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GIGER'S SPECIES

MGM'S FRANK MANCUSO ON
LAUNCHING THE SCI-FI FRANCHISE

OSCAR-WINNING DESIGNER
H.R. GIGER ON ALIEN CONCEPTS

CREATURE CREATOR STEVE JOHNSON
ON "SPECIES 2" EFFECTS MAGIC

JOHN CARPENTER'S "VAMPIRES"

"DEEP IMPACT" PREVIEW

"GODZILLA" UNDER WRAPS

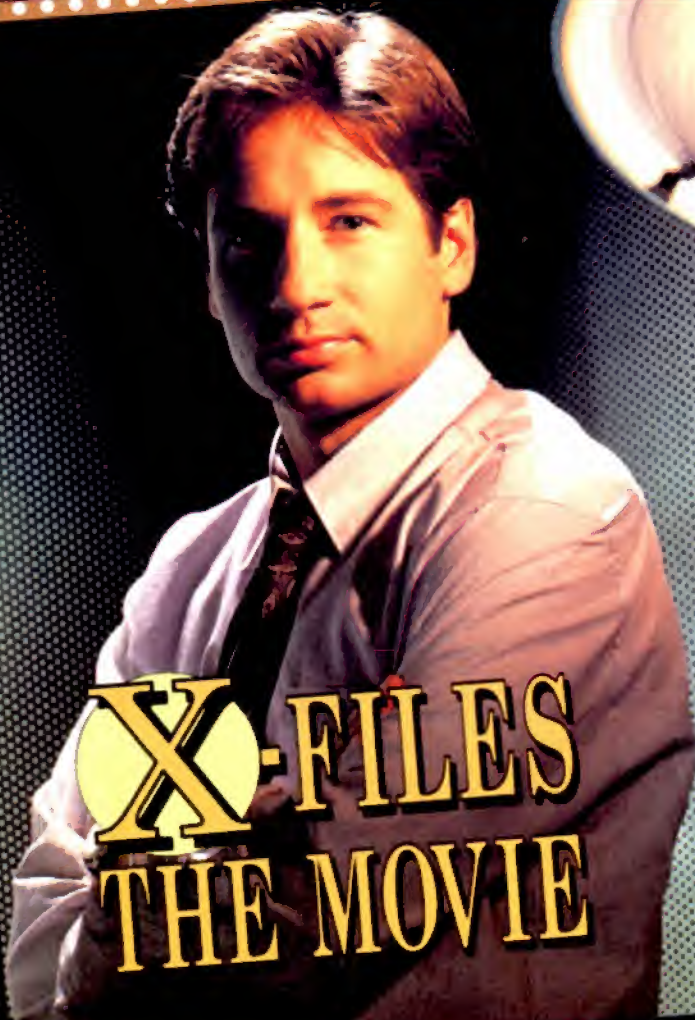
"X-FILES: THE MOVIE"

"TARZAN & THE LOST CITY"

Volume 30 Number 1



CINEFANTASTIQUE



X-FILES THE MOVIE

THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

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Also, you'll find previews of the summer's big-budget blockbusters, including the 800-ton behemoth GODZILLA, from the INDEPENDENCE DAY duo of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, the making of Disney's new animated epic MULAN, director Mimi Leder on filming Steven Spielberg's DEEP IMPACT, plus all the latest genre news and reviews!

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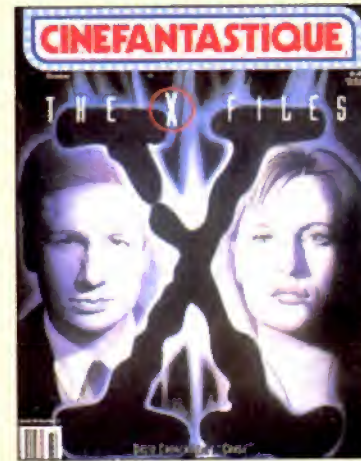
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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

MAY 1998

MGM moved up the release of SPECIES II (yes, the Roman numeral title is the correct one, not the Arabic 2 which appears in our earlier preview articles and in this issue's cover story). As we go to press, the film is set to open nationwide April 10 instead of June 5 as planned.

New York correspondent Dan Scapperotti provides this issue's cover story, reporting from SPECIES II's warehouse set in Maryland, a chronicle of how FRIDAY THE 13TH series producer Frank Mancuso has attempted to turn the success of the original SPECIES into a continuing horror and science fiction film franchise. Scapperotti interviews former X-FILES scripter Chris Brancato on crafting the sequel's strategy with Mancuso, as well as director Peter Medak (THE CHANGELING), creature creator Steve Johnson, CGI experts Digital Magic, star Natasha Henstridge and Oscar-winning alien designer H. R. Giger. We call our cover story "Giger's SPECIES" because it is the alien design work of the Swiss surrealist artist that makes the project most interesting in our eyes. We called our cover story on the original SPECIES "Giger's Alien," a reference to the designer's groundbreaking work on Ridley Scott's ALIEN and his seminal influence on science fiction film design. It was therefore a little distressing to receive Giger's personal request, as we went to press, to remove his name from the cover, a request we could not honor due to our press deadline.

After seeing a cut of SPECIES II, Giger declined to take any credit for his design work for the film, claiming it was largely ignored or unused. On the sequel, Giger chose to take the credit "Original Species Design by H. R. Giger." Since it is that very design which graces the cover, magnificently realized by effects creator Steve Johnson's XFX for the new sequel, spotlighting Giger's key contribution to the project is not inappropriate. Too bad the production chose to ignore his other work.

Frederick S. Clarke



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Publisher & Editor: Frederick S. Clarke. **West Coast Editor:** Steve Biodrowski. **Bureaus:** New York/ Dan Persons, Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles/ Douglas Eby. London/ Alan Jones. **Contributors:** Frank Barron, Sonya Burres, William Wilson Goodson, Jr., Scott Tracy Griffin, Lokke Heiss, Randall Larson, Michael Lyons, Patricia Moir, John Thonen, Chuck Wagner, Paul Wardle. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Elaine Fiedler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington, David Bellm, Bob Garcia. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa Coduto. **Circulation:** Faith Redding. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

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CINEFANTASTIQUE (ISSN 0145-6032) is published monthly at 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. (708) 366-5566. E-mail: mail@cfq.com Second class postage paid at Forest Park, IL 60130 & additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to CINEFANTASTIQUE, P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303. **Subscriptions:** 12 Issues \$48, 18 issues \$69, 24 Issues \$90. (Foreign & Canada: 12 Issues \$55, 18 issues \$80, 24 Issues \$100.) Single copies: \$8. **Retail Distribution:** In the U.S. by Eastern News Distributors, 250 W. 55th St., New York, NY 10019. (800) 221-3148. **Submissions** of artwork and articles are encouraged, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Contents copyright ©1998 by Frederick S. Clarke. CINEFANTASTIQUE ® is a Registered U.S. Trademark. **PRINTED IN USA.**

EAGERLY AWAITED

THE X-FILES (Fox)

Although the film was originally supposed to be a stand-alone work, now it turns out that the plot will be the culmination of the TV series' latest season, in which Mulder and Scully investigate the bombing of a Dallas office building. David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson reprise their roles, along with stalwarts Mitch Pileggi, John Neville, and William B. Davis (you didn't really believe the Cigarette Smoking man was dead, did you?). Also appearing are Martin Landau, Blythe Danner, and Terry O'Quinn (a crossover with MILLENNIUM, perhaps?). Rob Bowman directs, from a script by Chris Carter.

June 19



QUEST FOR CAMELOT (WB) May 15

Warner Bros. Feature Animation turns to the Arthurian legend for their first full-length fully-animated feature. Set during the early days of King Arthur's reign, the film centers on a strong-willed girl named Kayley and young blind man named Garret (pictured below), who find themselves the only hope to stop the evil Ruler from stealing Excalibur and conquering the kingdom. The film comes armed with an array of star voices, including Pierce Brosnan, Gary Oldman, Sir John Gielgud (as Merlin), and Eric Idle and Don Rickles as a bickering two-headed dragon. In addition, the film will combine computer and traditional animation in some sequences, and will include songs by composer David Foster and lyricist Carole Bayer Sager. QUEST, which was directed by first-timer Frederick Du Chau, was finished after an extended production schedule, during which many involved had to jump off this project to assist in the production of SPACE JAM. That film, which proved to be a hit, offered an alternative to Disney. Now Warner Bros. hopes to grab their share of the Disney Studio's predictable summer reign at the boxoffice.

Mike Lyons



BABY GENIUSES (WB) April 10

Bob Clark wrote and directed this family fantasy, from a story by producer Steven Paul, about babies who can communicate through a secret language. Kathleen Turner and Christopher Lloyd star as evil scientists trying to exploit these baby geniuses. Kim Cattrall, Peter MacNicol, and Dom DeLuise co-star.

BARNEY'S GREAT ADVENTURE (Polygram) Now playing

The purple dinosaur's big-screen debut slipped under our radar, opening on April 3. You probably missed it because we neglected to mention it in the last Release Schedule. Somehow, we think you'll forgive us.

THE BUTCHER BOY (WB) April 17

After abandoning plans for a brief run in November to qualify for this year's Oscars, Warners finally released this Neil Jordan film in New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto on April 3. Now, the release expands into other major cities. Although the studio adopted this release strategy because they consider the film a "dysfunctional family drama," there is a borderline fantasy element in this story of a small boy (Eamonn Owens) who retreats into the comic-book world of his dreams to escape the harsh realities of real life. Stephen Rea co-stars.

CITY OF ANGELS (WB) April 10

Nicolas Cage, Meg Ryan, and Dennis Franz star in this remake of Wim Wenders' German-language masterpiece, WINGS OF DESIRE. Outside of the commercial prospects generated by English-speaking stars, it's hard to see the point.

CUBE (Trimark) May

Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* gets the sci-fi treatment in this independent film about a group of characters trapped inside a mysterious, deadly structure, from which there appears to be no escape. SEE CFQ 29:11.

GODZILLA (TriStar) May 22

In a move apparently inspired not by the Toho movies but by Mark Jacobson's novel *Gojiro*, the King of the Monsters is no longer an ancient dinosaur mutated by radiation, but a lowly Iguana lizard. And the blame for nuclear testing has been switched from the U.S.A. to France. From the ID4 team of Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich. SEE PAGE 10.

NIGHT WATCH (Dimension) April 17

Well, they did it again. After numerous previously announced release dates had been abandoned, for a brief moment it actually seemed as if this film would come out on March 20. Then in a move we've come to expect over the course of the last year, the film was pushed back another month.

THE SPANISH PRISONER (Sony Classics) April 17

Campbell Scott, Steve Martin, Ben Gazzara star in David Mamet's thriller that, according to advance word, contains some borderline genre elements.

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



TARZAN JUNGLE WARRIOR (WB) April

Warner Bros. thinks it has a summer blockbuster, starring Casper Van Dien and Jane March. So why release it in April? Because the studio is contractually obligated to distribute the film a year before Disney's animated version bows in the summer 1999. Still, Warners is hoping to get an extension. SEE PAGE 34

THE UGLY (Trimark) April (exclusive)

After festival screenings at Toronto and Sundance, this independent psycho-horror film from first-time feature director Scott Reynolds was picked up for U.S. distribution by Trimark, who intends to launch it in New York and move it through the rest of the country on a regional basis. The SILENCE OF THE LAMBS-type story involves a psychiatrist who enters a maximum security prison-asylum to pick the brains of a demented serial killer. SEE PAGES 14, 59.

BIG-SCREEN RE-AVENGE

THE AVENGERS (WB)

"I'm trying to make a movie that nobody has ever seen before; an original, kinetic, exciting visual phenomenon that is absolutely energized by three amazing characters, played by three extraordinary actors, whose odd relationships are so interesting, quirky and fun that the scenes between them are as exciting and thrilling as the huge action scenes." That's director Jeremiah Chechik, talking about his feature film version of the 1960s' British spy show, THE AVENGERS. Ralph Fiennes and Uma Thurman star as John Steed and Ema Peel, role originated by Patrick Macnee and Diana Rigg. The director added, "There was always an energizing vibe about the Macnee-Rigg series, and the situations they were put in were so unusual and original. That's what we've aimed for with the movie and why it's set in a '60s version of 1999. It's like the Swinging Sixties never went away and got combined with the 'Cool Britannia' feel of contemporary London. The timeless period we've chosen takes the whole concept to the next level it would have grown to in all our minds had the series continued for the last thirty years."

Alan Jones

June 19

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

INVASION AMERICA

Harve Bennett produces Steven Spielberg's animated alien invasion.

by Frank Barron

"No one has ever done a serious drama—let alone a serious serial drama, in animation prime time," noted executive producer Harve Bennett of WB Television Network's *INVASION AMERICA*, a science-fiction animated series created by Steven Spielberg and developed by Bennett. *INVASION AMERICA* is "A tale of nobility, a tale of heroism. A tale that dares to say our life is worth fighting for, and our world is a good place to live," Bennett added.

According to Bennett, the idea had been "bubbling for probably this entire decade in Spielberg's head, undergoing several incarnations within his own mind and on paper, at Amblin [Spielberg's company] and at Warner Bros. When he started DreamWorks, Warners saw the potential of it at last, and Steven asked me to develop it and bring it to the screen."

Despite having no animation background, Bennett, who produced four *STAR TREK* features and numerous TV shows (e.g. *THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN*), plunged into the project, being a storyteller who figured "this was a great way to expand my horizons in film." He tested the concept out initially for friends of all ages, "and everybody seemed to dig the yarn. The show is more universal than we started out to do."

Bennett felt that with *INVASION AMERICA*, he has a chance "to do an Arthurian legendary kind of series for the entire family, since we are science fiction—not about flying saucers, alien abductions, or other tabloid things. It is geared for teens and adults, not just for kids. It is a filmic style that people haven't seen before, so they do not associate it with cartoon animation. It is more in the style of a miniseries." Bennett added that the show "is about the realm of the possible.



INVASION AMERICA, which debuts on the Warner Bros. Network later this year, bills itself as TV's first dramatic animated science-fiction series.

The hero is a 16-year-old, typical American teenager, whom we see as a young King Arthur, fighting against evil.... I've always felt that science fiction falls into two broad categories. One category says the world will be a terrible dark place. The other example is the world is a wonderful place, and things will be very interesting and different."

Bennett, despite being "a frustrat-

ed painter who can't paint," explained that there was a difference in imaging "that Steven and I discussed. His aliens tend to be what we call in science fiction 'grey man.' The Roswell syndrome. Creatures who are not necessary humanoid, but are in varying degrees disguised different. When I read the presentation, one of the things that struck me was that I thought they should be more humanoid, that they should be of Earth, related to the Earth, so they could pass among us. Steven agreed to that, and we have a wide variety of people who look a little exotic, but human. That—if you remember a science fiction series called *THE INVADERS*—is a different way to tell an alien intrusion into our life story. That's one of the impacts I made on the visual."

INVASION AMERICA was animated in Korea, where *KING OF THE HILL* and *THE SIMPSONS* are done. Throughout conferences and shooting of the series, Spielberg "has played more than an important role," Bennett explained. "He's been with us for meetings, conferences, art approval. He was not at my side, but over my shoulder. Many of the conversations

continued on next page

Genre Genies

by Patricia Moir

Although fans of *cinéfantastique* were likely disappointed once again by this year's Academy Awards, they can take heart in the fact that, outside the U.S., genre films are being honored with awards for technical and artistic merit. This year, the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television's annual Genie Awards, which recognize achievement in Canadian cinema, bestowed top nominations on no less than three genre films.

Best picture nominees included Lynne Stopkewich's *KISSED*, a modest independent entry which manages to make the subject of necrophilia not only inoffensive but strangely sympathetic; Molly Parker garnered a best actress award for her performance in the film. Also nominated was *KARMINA*, a vampire movie from Quebecois director Gabriel Pelletier. Ranging from 19th-century Transylvania to contemporary Montreal, this romantic adventure tale follows vamp Karmina as she flees her traditional roots, settles in with her aunt, and finds true love with a human rock musician. *KARMINA* also received nominations for photography and editing, and awards for art direction, costume design, and makeup. Supporting actress France Castel was nominated for her roles in both *KARMINA* and André Forcier's *LA COMTESSE DE BATON ROUGE*, the story of a tragic love affair between a young filmmaker and a bearded lady in a Louisiana circus. *LA COMTESSE* was also nominated for best editing, while acting nominations went to Robin Aubert for his leading role and Frédéric Desager for his supporting performance as a one-eyed cyclops from the sideshow. Also nominated for best picture were *COSMOS*, a compilation of loosely-related vignettes from six Quebecois filmmakers, ranging in tone from the realistic to the surreal, and Thom Fitzgerald's *THE HANGING GARDEN*, about a young gay man haunted by the spectre of his former, closeted teen self. Fitzgerald won the special Claude Jutra Award for first-time

continued on next page

Short Notes

James Spader (*STARGATE*) is planning to star in United Artists' *SUPERNOVA*. The script by **Tom Wheeler** and **Dan Chuba** follows a space-going rescue ship, the *Nova-17*, that responds to a distress call from a battered salvage spaceship. The rescue crew finds a black hole that threatens to destroy both ships...and a mysterious survivor whose body quickly mutates into a monstrous—and deadly—form. ☞ **Kyle MacLachlan** (*TWIN PEAKS*) has signed to star in the one-hour television drama *THE INVISIBLE MAN*. **Donald Petrie** (*MY FAVORITE MARTIAN*) will direct the series pilot, which is alleged based on the H.G. Wells novel, although the plot sounds more like the short-lived David McCallum series of the 1970s. ☞ Actress **Meg Ryan**'s production company, Prufrock Pictures, is developing a teen-horror project in conjunction with Castle Rock, based on a pitch from Todd Slavkin and Darren Swimmer. The project follows fast on the heels of *LOST SOULS*, which Ryan has set up at New Line. ☞ For reasons that elude us at the moment, MGM (which seems unable to make a hit out of anything except James Bond) is planning a sequel to *CARRIE*. □

continued from previous page

director of a feature film, while the movie received nominations for two supporting actors and an award for best screenplay.

Although the majority of top awards went to Atom Egoyan's more mainstream film, *THE SWEET HEREAFTER*, the Academy's recognition of genre entries demonstrates an attitude rarely found in the American film industry. The reasons for the difference are largely historical. While American cinema developed almost entirely within a capitalist context, the Canadian industry has its roots in government-funded experimental filmmaking. Publicly-owned investment corporations provide the initial funding for most of Canada's independent productions, recycling their profits back into further industry development, and bringing promising talent to the attention of private investors who would otherwise be less likely to take financial risks. The result has been a thriving national film industry which, like that of Australia in past decades, has consistently rewarded inventive and unconventional approaches. Consequently, Canadian directors like David Cronenberg, despite financial inducements from the U.S., have chosen to remain in Canada



Aardman Animations, creators of Oscar-nominated short subject *WAT'S PIG* (above) are embarking on their first feature, to be distributed by DreamWorks.

where their forays into the fantastic are not treated as artistic liabilities.

While Canadian films occupy only about 3% of screens at any given time, government-funded television keeps home-grown movies in the public eye. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation regularly airs national films in both English and French. Unlike major U.S. networks, the CBC does not censor feature films, so genre works that might be deemed unacceptable for American television are seen uncut by large audiences in Canada. Canadian viewers, although enthusiastic consumers of American movies, are given ample opportunity to sample films that fall well outside of the mainstream, resulting in a generally more open-minded and sophisticated viewing public than one would expect to

find in the U.S. Movies like Cronenberg's sexually explicit and violent *Crash*, which took the top award at last year's Genies, cause scarcely a ripple of controversy, and even *KISSED*, which deals with what is arguably the ultimate taboo subject, has generated only a thoughtful curiosity, even among more conservative viewers and critics.

Canadian films are now receiving more exposure and acclaim from beyond national borders than ever before. The industry's recent history seems to promise continuing ventures into unusual artistic realms, with more opportunities for American audiences to savor the results. Genre fans take note—and keep an eye on your local movie listings for the titles mentioned above and future fantastic films from north of the border. □

Invading America

continued from previous page/ we had with Steven were about visual style. One of the great tasks had been to get conventional animators to let go of things they've depended on, and create a new visual style."

The show utilizes numerous recognized voices, including Edward Albert, Ronny Cox, Tippi Hedren, Lorenzo Lamas, Kristy McNichol, Leonard Nimoy (a very mean guy in this series), James B. Sicking, Dee Wallace Stone, Rider Strong, and Robert Urich, plus Mikey Kelley, who plays David Carter, the lead role.

WB TV is already planning on a Book Two for next season, although not knowing at this point whether the shows will be a continuation of the original stories or head into a completely different direction, either as a 13-part novel, or a continuing cliffhanger. □

Production Starts



FROM DUSK TILL DAWN: TEXAS BLOOD MONEY

They've barely finished shooting the first prequel/sequel, but that hasn't stopped Dimension films from putting another installment into production. T-2's Robert Patrick heads the cast for director Scott Spiegel, who co-wrote the script with Duane Whitaker. Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez take exec producer credits.

SOLDIER

Kurt Russell and Jason Scott Lee star in this science-fiction western, written by David Webb Peoples (12 MONKEYS, UNFORGIVEN). A sort of companion piece to *BLADE RUNNER* (which Peoples co-wrote), the film follows an outdated replicant soldier trying to escape his military masters on a godforsaken planet. In *CFQ* 29:2, director Paul Anderson described it as "SHANE in space."

by Mike Lyons

The "Mouse House"—i.e., Disney—was recently out-bid by former employee Larry Katzenberg's DreamWorks for U.S. distribution rights to *CHICKEN RUN*, the debut feature film from Aardman Animations. The story will revolve around a group of chickens who try to break away from the farm and make a run for freedom. The stop-motion film is being directed by Aardman's resident experts, Peter Lord (Oscar-nominated for *WAT'S PIG*) and Nick Park (Oscar-winner for *THE WRONG TROUSERS* and *A CLOSE SHAVE*, both of which starred Wallace and Gromit, two characters quickly gaining on Mickey and Bugs in popularity.

Speaking of Looney Tunes characters, there's sad news from Warner Bros. While gearing up for *QUEST FOR CAMELOT*, the studio announced the shut down of the three-year-old Chuck Jones Film Productions. The unit was started by the legendary animator as a joint effort to bring animated shorts back to theatres. Since 1993, the company produced six cartoons, all featuring the classic Looney Tunes characters. Four of the shorts, including *CHARIOTS OF FUR* and *ANOTHER FROGGY EVENING*, were directed by Jones himself. Unfortunately, the films failed to generate much boxoffice attention, because most were paired with mediocre family films, such as *RICHIE RICH* and *THE AMAZING PANDA ADVENTURE*.

Fox Animation, on the other hand, shows no signs of a shut-down. Their debut, *ANASTASIA*, proved to be a successful challenger to the Disney crown; now the studio turns away from historically-inspired fairy tales to science-fiction, with *PLANET ICE*. Set in a future when Earth has been destroyed by an alien race, the film will center on Cale (voice by Matt Damon), a young man who finds a map and teams up with a Han Solo-like character, Joe Korso (Bill Pullman) to find Planet Ice. The film is being directed by Art Vitello, a veteran of many Fox animated TV shows, such as *TINY TOON ADVENTURES*. The film's release date will no doubt be scheduled to beat or go head-to-head with Disney's animated science-fiction epic, *TREASURE PLANET*. □

JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES

James Woods stars as vampire hunter.

By John Thonen

John Carpenter's renowned faithfulness to budget, script and schedule and the solid performance of his films in overseas markets, has kept him attractive to producers despite the lackluster box office of his last few films. Thus, the barrels of Snake Plissken's *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* weaponry had barely cooled before Carpenter was again at work. The result? The upcoming *VAMPIRES*, which wrapped production this past August in New Mexico. The film is the prolific director's 20th since his 1974 semi-professional debut, *DARK STAR*.

Adapted from John Steakley's novel, the film details the exploits of Team Crow, a crossbow-wielding band of papal-authorized vampire hunters. James Woods (*VIDEODROME*) essays the part of Team leader Jack Crow. Woods is physically less imposing than the 6'2" behemoth of Steakley's book. The notably intense actor seems otherwise perfectly cast as the obsessed and psychologically troubled warrior. The film also features veteran actor Maximilian Schell (*THE BLACK HOLE*) as Vatican liaison Alba, Sheryl Lee (*TWIN PEAKS*) as Katrina, a prostitute with a psychic link to the vampires, and low-budget martial-arts star Thomas Ian Griffith as Valick, Crow's vampiric nemesis.

While Carpenter completed the film in a speedy eight weeks, the journey of Steakley's novel to the screen was not so expeditious. Film rights to the action-oriented horror tale were snatched up in January 1990. A scant nine days after the author submitted the book to his publisher. While several directors have been attached, the project had



Bloodsuckers in Santa Fe, N. M. Below: James Woods with stunt woman Anita Hart. Right: Carpenter with stunt coordinator Jeff Imada.



basically languished. Many considered it dead before Carpenter came along with a new take on the Don Jakoby (*ARACHNOPHOBIA*)-Dan Mazur (*NIGHT OF THE SCARECROW*) script.

In an interview on E, James Woods described the film as "Kind of, *THE WILD BUNCH* meets the vampires." The apparent Western motif is not surprising. Carpenter has long professed a desire to work in that most American of genres. Those that have seen the film's trailer in France, where it opens this Spring, describe action scenes remi-



niscent of Carpenter's 1976 *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13*. A film most critics view as a Western in 20th century garb.

Steakley's ferocious action sequences coupled with Carpenter's visual panache would seem to offer *SCREAM*-like breakthrough potential for the film. The biggest hurdle *VAMPIRES* may face is not the crossbows of Team Crow, but rather which vampire hunter film takes the first bite out of the box office: James Woods in *VAMPIRES*? Or Wesley Snipes in *BLADE*? □

DEEP IMPACT

Mimi Leder directs the DreamWorks comet collision epic.

By Douglas Eby

Although its screenplay is based on novels *The Hammer of God* (Arthur C. Clarke), and *When Worlds Collide* (Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie), her new film DEEP IMPACT is not the same story, noted director Mimi Leder: "I don't think it's very close at all. And I was actually asked not to read either

The President (Morgan Freeman) briefs the press on Earth's impending destruction and NASA's plans.



book." The Paramount-DreamWorks project is being produced by Joan Bradshaw (CONTACT) and Steven Spielberg, teaming up with David Brown and Richard Zanuck, with whom Spielberg made his first two films as director, SUGARLAND EXPRESS and JAWS. Paramount opens the science fiction epic for Memorial Day in May.

DEEP IMPACT, written by Bruce Joel Rubin, Michael Tolkin and John Wells, follows three main stories in connection with the discovery of an impending collision of a comet with the Earth, and the responses made to attempt to avert global destruction. Leder earlier was given some media attention as director of THE PEACEMAKER, the first feature for DreamWorks, and was quoted in the *L. A. Times* as asking Spielberg why he made the decision to hire her for a large-scale Hollywood action film, to which he replied "You're directing action every day on E.R."

Leder's second film is high on action, which she confirmed she really enjoys, but she also focuses on the human dimensions of the story. Pointing out that L.A. LAW was her first directing job, and that she produced and directed CHINA BEACH, Leder noted, "My work has primarily been in dra-



Astronauts work to divert the path of the comet threatening Earth.

ma, and I would say DEEP IMPACT is an epic drama. Because it deals with—if the comet is going to hit and end the world—what would you do as a person? What would your life be? What decisions would you make?" In THE PEACEMAKER Leder managed a high level of action, while still maintaining an intimate involvement with the characters, and that is what she says she has aimed to do in DEEP IMPACT as well.

But the main event of the story is not exactly intimate in scale, and the film's budget is re-

portedly in the \$75-million to \$100-million-plus range. The 1951 George Pal production of WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE had Oscar-winning special effects shots, such as the submersion of Manhattan. For DEEP IMPACT, ILM (Industrial Light and Magic) will create elaborate CGI-based effects, such as a massive tidal wave that will wipe out a traffic jam. With much coverage in the media lately about the potential devastation of El Nino storms, Leder is also concerned with apocalyptic events in real life. "I hope

The right stuff: Robert Duvall as former astronaut Spurgeon Turner, who comes out of retirement (shades of John Glenn!) to lead an international crew aboard an experimental spaceship dubbed the Messiah, attempting to divert disaster.





Impact at theaters: Memorial Day.

when people walk out of the film, they will cherish their lives more, and pay more attention to the everyday moments."

The film's accomplished cast includes Téa Leoni, Vanessa Redgrave, Maximilian Schell, Mary McCormack, Blair Underwood, and Morgan Freeman as the beleaguered U. S. President. Elijah Wood plays a kid who discovers the comet hurtling toward Earth while viewing stars for his astronomy class. Robert Duvall is an aging astronaut called on one last mission, a NASA attempt to push the comet out of the way with a rocket engine. The attempt is a partial success, leaving a menacing chunk hurtling toward Earth, where a lottery system is set up to decide who will be permitted to gain safety in underground caves and mine shafts. Leder noted the challenge in all this was to "keep the emotion of fear or survival in the face of a tidal wave. How do you keep the human emotion high, and how do you as an audience feel emotionally attached to these people while a big disaster is happening?" In the midst of editing, she's aiming at that kind of suspense. □

Stuck in Traffic for DreamWorks

A day in the life of a movie extra.

By David Hines

What's it like to be an extra on the set of a big-budget movie like DEEP IMPACT?

In a word: impressive. Unlike many actors who have actual parts in the film, I'm assured that my scene won't wind up on the cutting room floor. Unlike them, I'm not sure that if the scene makes it to the theater, I'll be visible. Picture the biggest traffic jam you've been in. Now imagine planning to spend all day in it. See that little dot, right there? That's me.

Thousands of panicking people are fleeing the comet, creating an enormous traffic jam. Into this traffic jam, Elijah Wood rides a motorcycle to rescue his girlfriend before she and her family are drowned by an impending tidal wave. He gets her out. A couple of hours later (in "film time"), the comet flies overhead, crashes into the sea, and a thousand-foot-high wall of water deluges the screaming crowds.

That's what it'll look like on the big screen. In person, it looks like a mile and a half line of cars covering six lanes of highway, filmed in the heat of summer pushing 100 degrees. For this one scene (a couple of scenes, really), the DEEP IMPACT crew assembled around 1800 cars and 1900 extras. Reports vary regarding whether the number of cars will be digitally enlarged. Extras near the front heard an Industrial Light & Magic wizard grumbling about the number of real cars, on the grounds that ILM could digitally replicate the crowd at a lower cost than hiring all these extras.

The DreamWorks coordina-



Cooling my heels in traffic on a yet-to-be-opened expressway-turned-movie set, waiting for ILM's tidal wave.

tor declined to tell me the film's budget, saying, "I don't know—it's not *my* money!" Regardless of whose money was being spent, the scene was clearly extremely expensive. Assuming that each extra is paid \$100—which is closer to two-thirds what most extras *really* got—that one day of filming cost around \$200,000 dollars in extras' fees alone. That's not counting the salaries of the main cast and crew, the cost of boxed breakfasts and lunches for almost two thousand people, the catered lunch for cast and crew, the cost of film, the helicopters (three of them), or the fees to the state of Virginia in exchange for the permission to shoot on the not-yet-open bypass. Nor does it include ILM's fee to kill the entire crowd in a spectacular manner.

"Who cares about that," you ask? "What's filming actually like?" It's kind of dull, really—but then, I didn't do much of it.

My call time was 6:30 (the last call time for extras), and no shooting was done for over two hours after that. We were given directions over our car radios that basically boiled down to "drive while yelling and honking at each other," "stop," "back up and do it again," "look up at the comet that's about to crash down and destroy you all," or "get out of your cars and run screaming like there's a thousand-foot-high wall of water with your name on it headed *Right this way!*" If you've ever been an extra in a crowd scene (particularly in the back of a crowd scene), you'll know that you spend a lot of time sitting around

waiting to be told what to do. I'd estimate that out of a thirteen-hour day, I spent half an hour, total, doing stuff for the camera. Most of my time was spent sitting on my tuchis drinking bottled water. (And I can verify that the Porta-Pottys stank to high heaven by 8:30 A.M.)

Was it hot and uncomfortable? Sure. But it was interesting to see, and impressive on a logistical level. One of the people involved in the promotional film about the making of DEEP IMPACT explained to me why he liked Hollywood films. "You know," he said, "anybody can take two people talking and put them in a room. But this—not just anybody can do this. This is *special*." DEEP IMPACT may not turn out to be great art. It's an effects-laden summer film, after all. But as an exercise in planning, it's a stunner—and in Hollywood these days, that's often enough. □

INCREDIBLE, UNSTOPPABLE TITAN OF TERROR

GODZILLA

It's Alive!

KING OF THE MONSTERS

CIVILIZATION CRUMBLES as its death rays blast a city of 6 million from the face of the earth!

MIGHTIEST MONSTER!
MIGHTIEST MELODRAMA of them all!

RAYMOND BURR

inspired by THREE MONSTERS from JAPAN
A TRI-STAR WORLD FILM



Dean Devlin

By Chuck Wagner

When writer/producer Dean Devlin and producer/director Roland Emmerich say they are treating their GODZILLA remake seriously, you have to take that in light of the theatrical trailers promoting their film: thus far two promos have both played the monster for laughs. "What you don't want to do is make fun of GODZILLA," said Devlin. TriStar opens their big-budget remake nationwide May 22.

Devlin and Emmerich saw the potential for a serious GODZILLA in the script developed by Jan DeBont before he left the project. Noted Devlin, "He developed a really good script and even though we decided to abandon that script and go a completely different direction, what it did tell us was that it can be done elegantly and you can do it straight. And when I say straight, I mean still with a lot of humor, but respectfully.

"I think what Roland and I did with WAR OF THE WORLDS [ID4] was a gas and fun, but it wasn't MARS ATTACKS. We took it seriously. And that's what we're trying to do with GODZILLA—reinvent him, as though there was no previous one, but yet being respectful to the origins and the intent of the original film."

Devlin and Emmerich had to work under the watchful eye of Japan's Toko Studios, the creators of the original GODZILLA,

The 1956 Japanese inspiration. Below: Playing the monster for laughs in ads showing only his foot (l) and eye.



GODZILLA

and Roland Emmerich pump the effects.

who exercised the right of approval on their work. "That's why before we even started, we went to Japan," said Devlin. "We had a long conversation and told them what we wanted to do, and once they signed off on that conceptually, they pretty much let us make the picture we wanted to make. But they still come down and they look at things, because they want to make sure that it's being handled properly, and I don't blame them because it's been a big franchise for them for a long time."

Devlin and Emmerich collaborated on the script. "We wrote the first draft fairly quickly, in five-and-a-half weeks in Mexico," said Devlin. "And of course we revise it as we work on it, but for the most part, structurally, it hasn't changed at all. As the effects department comes up with new gadgets we try and add new gags."

The script takes place in the United States with primarily an American cast. Devlin spoke of being fortunate to get Matthew Broderick and Jean Reno for the film. "Every time we'd done a film, they were not available," said Devlin. "So this time, before we even started writing, we set up meetings with both of them and asked them not to take another job!"

One doesn't think of Matthew Broderick as the hero in a film like GODZILLA... "I'm tired of the super-muscle-bound heroes in movies," Devlin said. "I like to see a clever hero."

Also in the cast are three of the voice actors from THE SIMPSONS—Hank Azaria, Nancy Cartwright and Harry Shearer. In addition to Broderick and Reno, the film stars Mary Pitillo, Michael Lerner, Doug Savant, Kevin Dunn, Vicki Lewis, and Arabella Field.

Devlin wouldn't discuss budget figures but said TriStar is getting a bargain. "We're shooting this only a couple of days longer than ID4. The budget is higher than INDE-

"The new Godzilla is a combination of effects—including a man-in-a-suit and a one-sixth model—the only life-size thing we did was the toes!"



Writer/producer Dean Devlin on location in New York, so confident of the film's blockbuster status that two sequels are already in the planning stages.

PENDENCE DAY, but not anywhere near the kind of budgets that are coming out. TITANIC? It's not even SPEED 2! I think the budget is very reasonable. This is a much bigger film production-wise than even ID4, so doing it at the cost we're pulling off is kind of a miracle."

GODZILLA takes place primarily in New York City, where Devlin and Emmerich did some location shooting. "That was really hard," Devlin said, his voice slowing. "New York is just brutal, as far as cost. It's a great city to shoot, it looks gorgeous, but it's very expensive. The fact that we were able to get out of New York only one day over schedule was amazing. I attribute all of that to Roland. We were there

for four-and-a-half weeks. We were blocking off ten square city blocks at a time. It was a huge logistical nightmare trying to shoot in the city, plus the traffic jam we were creating. It was really hard to pull off. I attribute all of the success of that to Roland, because he's so precise in what he wants and he's at the top of his game. I've never seen him like this on a picture. It's like watching [basketball star Michael] Jordan on a streak. Every day he comes to the set, he has new ideas and he knows how he wants to shoot them and he shoots them fast."

Devlin and the filmmakers intend to keep Godzilla's new designs under wraps. "He's not a dinosaur. He's much more realistic-looking than the original Godzilla. It does feel like a creature you're familiar with. The movements are much better, because the technology is much better."

"Godzilla is an unusual character, because in a way he's both hero and villain. On one hand, he's the antagonist, causing enormous problems, but the audience roots for him."

What might help in rooting for Godzilla, is that Toho does not want anyone eaten by Godzilla (or at least have the eating shown).

Devlin noted that he and Emmerich would like to do two more GODZILLA films, and are pulling out the effects stops in achieving their vision for the monster. Said Devlin, "The new Godzilla is a combination of a lot of different effects: CGI, wire frame, models. We're using motion-capture to an extent it's never been used before. We've got some outstanding mimes and dancers in a special suit that gets translated by the computer for motion capture. So in a sense, we've got the man-in-a-suit, but in the highest tech sense. We have a one-sixth model Godzilla, which is even bigger than the biggest T-Rex used in JURASSIC PARK. I think the only life-size thing we did was...the toes!" □

X-FILES:

The award-winning hit Fox series debuts

By Douglas Eby

Essentially an extension of THE X-FILES series, rather than a takeoff, the movie will follow upon the final cliffhanger episode of the fifth season, heavily promoted and airing during May's ratings sweeps. Although story material for the movie is not being revealed by the filmmakers, the tone and style are likely to continue the tradition of the TV show, and portray "Credible, believable characters and credible, believable situations dealing with incredible and unexplainable phenomena," as Chris Carter said of the show's mission. In a recent *New York Times* piece (by James Sterngold) Carter said his personal "moral universe was being shaped when Watergate happened. It blew my world out of the water. It infused my whole thinking. I really think the world is spinning out of control. There's no work ethic any more and no real moral code. I'm trying to find images to dramatize that." He also confirmed the emotional importance of his two lead characters in that context: "They're not cynical in a very cynical age. These are two characters who are out of step. They're romantic. If they're naive, so be it." 20th Century-Fox opens X-FILES: THE MOVIE nationwide June 19.

Interviewed on the set, Carter noted that personally he may have concerns about the real government and real conspiracies, that the government is not telling everything, and that those concerns do of course play into developing the stories about the mythical and clandestine X-Files group. But the con-



Scully (Gillian Anderson) and Mulder (David Duchovny) investigate a mysterious bombing of a Dallas office building in X-FILES: THE MOVIE, opening June 19.

spiracy in the movie plot, he said, is not necessarily tied to a real life issue: "It's my conceit. It really plays as a metaphor for feelings about government and the abuse of power generally."

Producing the movie with Carter are Lata Ryan, Daniel Sackheim, and Frank Spotnitz, the script is by Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz; Rob Bowman, one of the series' finest genre stylists, and an alumnus of STAR TREK, directs; cinematography is by John S. Bartley; music is by series composer Mark Snow; production design is by Christopher Nowak; visual effects supervision is by Mat Beck; and effects by Lindala Makeup Effects, Inc., both of whom handle series' chores. Amalgamated Dynamics provides makeup assistance.

As for the craft of going from TV to feature film, Carter finds "the scope and scale is bigger, and we're getting to go places that we wouldn't get to go. But you're still shooting 35 mm, you still have the same problems, just bigger problems. The stumbling blocks are just

making sure you set out with the right scope of the story, of events, making sure you're making something worthy of the big screen. There are a couple of times when I thought THE X-FILES would make a good movie. When I'd seen an episode on a big screen at the Museum of Radio and Television, I thought 'This really translates.' But then, I also realized we'd been doing little movies for a long time for the

small screen, so it's really just taking what we do and applying big movie techniques to it." That attitude about the quality of the series has paid off in numerous awards for the show, plus Emmy, Writers Guild and Directors Guild nominations for Carter himself.

Usually, Carter noted, the TV production allows him to "find his way" to where he knows he wants to go, but with the movie being a followup to the season that has not even been shot yet, Carter said that is "just another problem to solve. I had to set my destination, fix it, and now I'm finding my way there. But it's a little more proscribed. I've had to think a little farther ahead because of the way things are set up. It's not better or worse, it's just different."

Carter stated that the story for the movie was not a matter of selecting from several potential ideas, but "owes everything to the mythology that will have been set up in, by that time, five years of mythology episodes and the conspiracy that Mulder

Finding a clue in a Texas field to an ancient, lethal alien threat and the government conspiracy that seeks to cover-up, aid and abet the otherworldly menace.



THE MOVIE

feature film, from producer **Chris Carter**.

and Scully have been trying to penetrate. So I knew that was what it was going to be about. It was just figuring out how to take all the elements I had already shown, and make them add up in a believable, scary way in what was going to be the movie. It wasn't considering plot A, B or C. I really knew what I had to do."

As with the series, Carter made story decisions based on his own reactions: "There will be things that hit us on a visceral level. I've got to every step of the way choose what I think would scare me, and hope it scares others along the way." But rather than using the physical and temporal scope of a movie to reveal things that are conveniently only alluded to in the series before the next commercial break, he noted, "The trick is not slipping or falling into the mistake of trying to satisfy a certain appetite that a big movie tries to satisfy, and not slipping into a horror convention where you show everything, 'slash 'em up, cut 'em up.' X-FILES has done well by showing a little or suggesting a lot. We have tried to keep true to that in the execution of this movie."

The rating target of the movie is PG-13, and Carter said that like with both of his TV series, "I'm not interested in blood; I'm not interested in gore, in violence per se. Although some of those things are part of telling any story like this. So I'm trying to make sure everything is done tastefully, if you will."

Carter said he did not even consider directing the movie himself: "It would have been absolute lunacy to attempt to do it in a responsible way, and the truth is Rob [Bowman] is going to do a better job than I could



Mulder seeks the answer to a long-dormant alien virus in Antarctica in a storyline from sixth season episodes and the cliff-hanger finale airing in May.

have done anyway. He's just a more seasoned director, and has experience with THE X-FILES, and is the guy I wanted doing it from the beginning. He's done 23 episodes, and he's got the ability and the desire."

Carter is reluctant to categorize the movie as a "relaunch" or "second pilot": "If you try to put a label on it, it does it a disservice. I mean, it plays as a movie, and I think the characters have reached a place, as we begin the movie, which is interesting and follows from where they began in the TV series. It's a new place from which to begin, and that's interesting in its own right."

With a degree and longtime experience in journalism, Carter points to ALL THE PRESI-

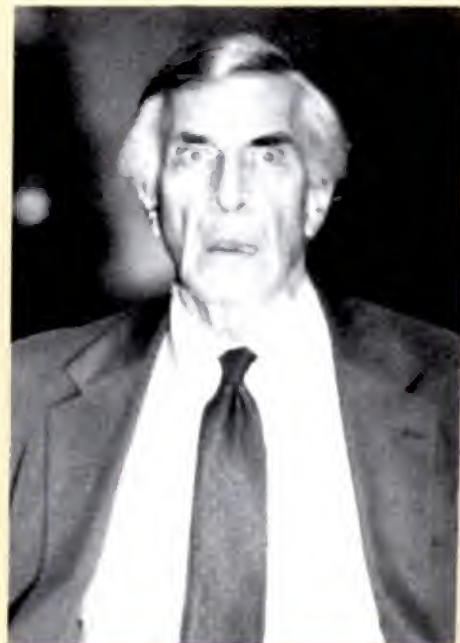
DENT'S MEN as one of his favorite movies, and one of the reasons he wanted to become a journalist, and the series, and now movie, still allows him some satisfaction that way: "You see a lot of that kind of conspiracy and political thriller kind of story-telling seeping into THE X-FILES, and that owes a lot to that kind of investigative thing that was attractive to me from a while back."

In the tradition of the series and what makes its episodes scary, Carter feels the movie "plays like a government conspiracy, and plays to our fears that we're nuts, that we're being lied to, that we're not being told the whole truth, that we're vulnerable in that what we ingest, what we consume, what we

breathe, what we take in as media consumers, may be bad for us. It really plays to a sense of unease that there may be more going on out there than we know. And that's what interests me, and the way I really believe the world works. I believe it works from selfishness, and every agency and bureaucracy has its own self-interest to perpetuate, and that we are all subject to that."

One of the producers of the original 1993 pilot for THE X-FILES was Daniel Sackheim, and Carter said one of the reasons he hired Sackheim, like others of the crew, is that they got along so well and "he's dedicated to the job. I always try to hire people that put the work above everything. So, he's one of those people, yet he can have a good time. But he's very intense, as am I. Dan's a great director in his own right, so I'd have the eyes of a director, Dan; the eyes of a less experienced director, me, and then Rob Bowman. All of us would be able to look at this with the right perspective." □

Oscar-winner Martin Landau as Kurtzwell, Mulder's father's friend in the State Department, who knows too much.



THE UGLY

Scott Reynolds debuts with a dark psycho-thriller.

By Alan Jones

There's a vibrant new talent from New Zealand making waves in his home country and on the world film festival circuit. His name is Scott Reynolds and the writer/director's debut horror feature *THE UGLY* has been winning awards all over Europe, including Best Actor for newcomer Paolo Rotondo at Rome's FantaFest and Best Director at the Sitges Fantasy Festival. The 28-year-old from Peter Jackson-land is a self-confessed genre addict and in *THE UGLY* has created a brilliant combination of dark humor, chilling thought and psychological fear all wrapped up in one of the most stylish visual packages seen in some time. Trimark Pictures opens Reynold's horror debut April 17 for an exclusive New York run.

SEVEN meets *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* in *THE UGLY*, a stunningly macabre, disturbing and structurally innovative post-modern psycho-thriller. Simon Cartwright (Rotondo) is a self-confessed murderer whose switchblade victims don't conform to any set profile usual for an assassin with his methodical precision. Locked away for five years in a grim asylum, he has never stood trial because of his fractured mental state, and celebrity lawyer Dr. Karen Shoemaker (Rebecca Hobbs) wants to change all that by getting inside his head to either certify him insane or prove he's cured. And so starts a horrific journey into the past with jolting repercussions for the present, especially as Simon says he's being forced to kill by supernatural Visitors.

"To sum it up, I love film—plain and simple," said the always energetic Kiwi. "I



The Visitors of Simon's imagination who force him to kill in director Scott Reynolds's *THE UGLY*, opening in New York April 17 from Trimark.

was a film fan before I was a filmmaker. I have sat in audiences where we all shivered and screamed, so the main reason why I wanted to make *THE UGLY* is so that I can sit in an audience where I make them respond in that way. I love being scared, I love terrifying sequences and seat-edged suspense. Mainly I wanted to create something no one has ever seen before. *SEVEN* blew me away. So did the recent version of *ROMEO AND JULIET*. Why not fuse Shakespeare with music? Why not make a horror cowboy movie? Why not bastardize one genre with another? That's what I did with *THE UGLY*, but out of genuine respect for the genres I chose."

You'll note many nods to Reynolds' favorite fright flicks throughout *THE UGLY*, albeit given a fresh approach by a director of clear taste with a sense of personality, con-

trol and vision. That's because he worked as a projectionist for ten years at the Hollywood Cinema in downtown Auckland run by his parents. You can even see the cinema in *THE UGLY*; it's where actor Rotondo carries out a murder in an alleyway and the police intrude on the killer's flashback. *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, Brian De Palma, *EVIL DEAD*, Alfred Hitchcock, *THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN*, *A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS*: these are a few of Reynolds's favorite things and the people who influenced him to become a filmmaker.

It all began with two short films—*THE MINUTE* and *A GAME WITH NO RULES*, both produced by Jonathan Dowling, the man behind Garth Maxwell's 1993 feature *JACK BE NIMBLE*. The latter short was bought by Miramax for theatrical release in America and it

was this which drew Reynolds to the attention of that company's head honchos, Harvey and Bob Weinstein.

Reynolds said, "Based on that short, they offered me some scripts to direct but I said no to them all even though I didn't have *THE UGLY* anywhere near being financed at the time. That confused them and, of course, because I turned them down, they wanted me even more. In fact, they financed my just completed film *HEAVEN* before they even saw *THE UGLY*. You see, I don't do this for money. I was unemployed in my basement for five years trying to write scripts and make films. Sure, Miramax offered security and some reasonably good scripts. But they weren't me and I'm not a 'Five picture deal' sort of guy."

THE UGLY cost under \$1.5 million to make and was produced by Jonathan Dowl-



Simon's first victim, filmed with a red costume to show off the effect of the black blood, the killer's colorless view of his crimes perpetrated under the direction of otherworldly voices.

ing with finance from the New Zealand Film Commission. Completed in December 1996, the arresting title comes from a torn page of 'The Ugly Duckling' fairy tale that young Simon reads to try and understand why he's being picked on by school bullies. Reynolds remarked, "I came up with the idea first of a guy who looks in the mirror and sees himself as deformed, even though he isn't really. I thought Serial Killer—this guy is sick and he talks about the hideous crimes which he has done. It wasn't because I thought a serial killer would be flavor of the month. I wanted something where, when he spoke about his past, he could relive it. Hence the reason I mix the present with the past and why, when Simon is in the flashbacks, people from the present often pop up."

Other stylish brushstrokes Reynolds uses to amazing effect are the film's color scheme of primarily red, white, blue, silver and black. Every drop of blood spilt is black, too. "The blood was edible maple syrup," he said. "Richard Taylor, the special effects makeup man who works on every Peter Jackson film, said it was the hardest thing to do. Keeping the liquid black was a huge problem because it kept turning blue or yellow and green. I remembered reading somewhere that John Carpenter used yellow and green pus more than vivid red blood when he made THE THING so he could get away with more. In one draft of the script I wrote the blood looked a lot like Indian ink and it stuck. That's because everything is from Simon's point of view and he would downplay the blood-letting in his mind to where it would be a neutral, in-offensive color. That's why there's a lot of red in the film and

why the first victim wears a red top—I didn't want people to think it was a mistake or a color grade thing."

He continued, "I did all of those outrageous things because I wasn't sure if I'd ever get another chance to make a movie so I chucked every idea I had into it. You only make a film with the idea of it being seen once, but I intentionally put a whole lot of stuff in you'll only get after multiple viewings."

Reynolds cleverly subverts the now time-honored dream-within-a-dream convention, too. Here that scary cliché is used to present Simon's fantasies of what he'd do to Karen should she unlock his handcuffs, juxtaposed with what Karen assumes he might do if she does indeed trust him. "It's just a double-clutch to me—the ending of CARRIE pushed to the limit. It's the same with the finale. Evil wins because I'm sick to death of happy endings. Karen may be too clever by half but she didn't deserve to die—which is the reason why she had to. The only way Simon can beat Karen is to kill her. She's outwitted him and it's the only macho thing to do. Very EC Comics."

Reynolds (l) directs Paolo Rotundo in makeup as Simon, which garnered Rotundo a Best Actor award at Spain's Sitges Fantasy Film Festival.



“Why not make a horror cowboy movie? Why not bastardize one with another? That’s what I did, but out of genuine respect.”

—Director Scott Reynolds—

Both lead actors, Paolo Rotundo and Rebecca Hobbs, were new to features. "We had no money for any sets except the main cell with the two-way mirror and the adjoining corridors," said Reynolds.

"I made THE UGLY for the 16-year-old Scott Reynolds who loves horror, switch-blade razors and death. I also made it for the 28-year-old Scott who wants to see a bit more depth in the genre and something cleverer than just plain old hack and slash. I do feel both of those elements run side by side in this weird little psychological thriller-cum-balls to the wall horror flick in which I've taken horror clichés and regenerated them into something different, with a new spin."

That new spin will continue with the movie Reynolds completed in the first three months of 1997 for Miramax, too. He remarked, "HEAVEN is completely different to THE UGLY, that's for sure. It's far more vicious. It's about an architect whose gambling has ruined his career and marriage. Then he meets a night club dancer, a transsexual named Heaven with psychic powers who turns his fortunes around. Martin Donovan, whom I loved in Hal Hartley's TRUST, one of my favorite films, plays Robert the architect, and Heaven is played by newcomer Danny Edwards. It's not THE CRYING GAME or PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT, it's a story of their search for redemption, leading to a horrific TAXI DRIVER-style blood bath."

"You see a man turned to a bloody pulp in HEAVEN," said Reynolds. "It's a different sort of horror film. Now I want to make a children's story. I want people to say, 'Is this the guy who made THE UGLY?' like they did about Peter Jackson when he made HEAVENLY CREATURES. I love Peter. I'm one of his biggest fans and he's been so supportive. When I was editing THE UGLY his advice was invaluable. If I ever get into that position, I hope I can help someone like he's helped me. Peter helped me achieve my ambition to scare audiences to death, or at least give them a few grey hairs. I'm the proudest guy in the world for being able to say I've actually done that." □

SPECIES 2

Frank Mancuso Jr. on making his hit into a solid franchise.

By Dan Scapperotti

The film had barely opened at the nation's movie theatres when it became apparent that SPECIES, the tale of an alien life form that threatens the existence of mankind, was going to be a hit for MGM. Producer Frank Mancuso, Jr. was no stranger to exploitable franchises, having navigated the FRIDAY THE 13TH series through seven entries. He was ready to launch another. MGM opens the sequel nationwide April 10.

SPECIES II takes off with the first manned flight to Mars. Astronaut Patrick Ross is selected to be the first man to set foot on the Red Planet. He gathers rock and soil samples from the frozen surface before returning to the mother ship. On the return voyage, communications are lost between the control center on Earth and the spaceship. When contact is re-established, everything seems to be normal. Ross and the other two astronauts, Gamble and Sampas, are treated to a hero's welcome when they get back on *terra firma*.

Meanwhile, in a high security facility, experiments are being conducted on Eve, a beautiful woman who has been bred from a hybrid of human and alien DNA. She was created for the specific purpose of developing an arsenal of weapons that could be used against the unknown race from beyond the stars. Unknown to Ross and his companions, two of them have



Allen beauty: Eve, clone of the original film's SII, design by H.R. Giger, fabricated for the sequel by Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc. of Sun Valley, California.



Michael Madsen returns as ex-Marine Press Lennox, facing Eve in a deserted barn at the film's climax. The MGM sequel opens nationwide April 10.

PRODUCER FRANK MANCUSO JR.

“I’ve always had an affinity for genre movies. When I’m making a movie of this type, I really feel that I have a lot of creativity to offer... I really have fun doing this.”

been infected with the same alien DNA from the defrosted Martian soil samples. As days pass, Ross begins to have an overriding desire to mate. He also gains a telepathic connection with Eve which could result in the end of mankind as the dominant species on the planet.

“We decided to make a sequel a couple of weeks after the release of the last one,” said Mancuso, standing amid a jumble of wires on the set of SPECIES II. “Interestingly enough we developed two completely different scripts. We did a more straight version of SPECIES, like SPECIES on steroids—a bigger, pumped-up version of the other movie. Then I had this idea that maybe the best thing to do, if you were thinking about a franchise, which I think is different from a sequel, is to take just a couple of elements out of the first movie and then completely reinvent a second structure using some of these common elements. That was the second, more risky version of the script and that’s the one we ended up doing.

“I’ve always had an affinity

for genre movies,” continued Mancuso. “When I’m making a movie of this type I really feel that I have a lot creatively to offer. I think about it a lot. I work hard at having fun with it because I’m really a fan of the world of SF. I really have fun doing this.”

In the original SPECIES, Sil—a little girl who was created through a mixture of human and alien DNA—escapes the laboratory and a team tracks her down. Much of the success of the original film was credited to newcomer Natasha Henstridge, whose stunning beauty and extensive nude scenes captured the attention of audiences worldwide. But Mancuso believed that there was a place for the actress in the new film, but, unlike the ALIEN films, not a necessity.

“I sat down with her and said ‘Look Natasha. Is this something you want to do? I’m happy to have you come back and do it, but if you don’t feel like doing it, I’m happy to do it without you. Whatever your preference is.’ I’d rather have her be one of the elements that came back than not, but at that

Director Peter Medak (r) and XFX supervisor Steve Johnson (l) rehearse Myriam Cyr as astronaut Ann Sampas, who gives birth to a tentacle when she makes love with her husband after she returns from Mars.



SPECIES 2

DIGITAL MAGIC

Blurring the line between CGI and practical effects.

By Dan Scapperotti

When producer Frank Mancuso and effects coordinator Steve Johnson decided that the extensive visual effects work on SPECIES II would be primarily done using practical effects methods, they realized that necessity required that some of the sequences would be augmented by computer graphics. The digital work was sent out for bid and Digital Magic was awarded the contract which prompted the company to invest \$3 million to expand its facility.

Until two years ago the five year old Santa Monica company did only basic CGI work and wire removals. When Ralph Maier became president of the film division and visual effects supervisor, Digital Magic took a more aggressive marketing stance in seeking film work. Maier set up a CGI department with Steve Brand in charge. The result was an expanded workload on such films as THE ARRIVAL, THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT, MORTAL KOMBAT, and WISHMASTER.

"When we first met with Steve Johnson," said Maier, "his people had a lot of the storyboards conceived already. We came up with a concept on how we were going to shoot the material. Then Joe Grossberg was brought in and we had a long roundtable about the sequences and how we were going to split them up. Joe and Wendy Grossberg were assigned the show and became the on-set visual effects supervisor and producer. They were sent to Maryland for principal photography because we also did a lot of motion con-



Astronaut Patrick Ross (Justin Lazard) sprouts a tentacle and kills his father Senator Ross (James Cromwell) on his return from Mars, CGI by Digital Magic.

rol work."

Teams were created to work on specific sequences. Their assignment was to create the effects of the spaceships, regenerated heads and digital augmentation of Johnson's practical effects. The ten people working in the CGI department and seven compositors were assigned to teams. Each team brainstormed to formulate a plan to shoot each sequence and create video storyboards. After feedback was solicited from the director, they launched into a preview stage and then a final stage where they built the elements.

When astronaut Patrick Ross returns from a Martian landing he is infected with alien DNA which begins to change his body. After the festivities of his homecoming, Patrick finally has some time alone with Melissa, his fiancée. But their love-making turns into a wave of terror for the woman as Patrick is wracked by the alien intruder, which proves fatal for Melissa.

"After Patrick kills his girlfriend he goes out onto the

porch and blows his brains out," said Maier. "We did a head regeneration shot. He shoots himself in the head and as we do a 360 degree turn around the head it regenerates itself. That was one of the larger motion control shots we did. We're doing 2D and water tank and mixing that with CGI to actually regenerate the whole head. That took three months. It's a \$120,000 shot."

Abhorred at what he has become after contamination by Alien DNA on Mars, Ross blows-off his head with a shotgun, only to have it grow back again, CGI enhancement (inset) of XFX makeup torso.



Another ten weeks were required to put the spaceship sequences on film. Vision Crew International built the motion control models of the spaceship and landing module. Maier's staff combined the models with computer generated planets and stars and added CG exhaust to the model footage. "We have quite a few complicated shots for that opening sequence," said Maier, "including a landing on the Mars surface and a take-off and some fairly complicated moves for the landing module and how it separates and then rejoins the mother ship."

Digital Magic also worked with some practical elements that were generated by Steve Johnson's XFX, including the debutante seduction scene. "Patrick meets the debutantes and he goes up to their hotel room," said Maier. "After he impregnates them, the fetuses grow immediately to the point where their bellies are splitting open. We're doing replacements, augmentations to



Natasha Henstridge as Eve in human form, subjected to experiments in a government lab, CGI enhancement of the set constructed in an abandoned General Electric plant in Columbia, Maryland.

the effects. The director, Peter Medak, didn't like the way it opened like a flower, so he wanted it changed and adapted. We're augmenting the birthing because the element coming out of the belly wasn't too effective. We'll add some CG elements to make it a little less symmetrical and a little more interesting."

One of the features of the creatures is a series of tentacles that can sprout from various orifices of their bodies. The deadly mission also results in a second of the ship's crew being infected. This is Dr. Anne Sampas, the mission's scientist who's first sexual encounter with her husband after her return to Earth ends horribly. Maier's staff will be augmenting the tentacle that stretches across the bed and lifts Mr. Sampas off the floor. They also worked on the tentacle that kills Senator Ross towards the end of the film.

"The tentacle that goes through his throat is being composited," said Maier. "We're combining the actor's live head and the animatronic body. The animatronic body needs to be stabilized. It needs to be placed in the same space as the actor. Then the element of the penetration needs to be composited into the throat area and it needs to be married to the actual actor's plate. There is quite a bit of image stabilization and warping of the image and some pretty significant compositing to make it look right."

Digital Magic also added CGI tentacles to the alien ooze Ross collects on Mars.

"The difference on this show was that all of the creature effects were done practical which hasn't been done a lot lately. Here, CG was being used pretty much as a helper. Someone will repair different areas of the practical creature. There's a puppeteer inside the creature, and many times there are shots where his arms and legs are outside of the creature and they have to be removed or replaced in some way. We would get together and decide how CGI would track new areas to replace the performer in those shots. So there is a lot of integration. It was important to get the two worlds to work well together. Steve was very open to that and was instrumental in helping us figure those elements out."

Digital composition will also be used to enhance Johnson's set piece for the finale. It takes place in a three story barn filled with a chrysalis. "In the chrysalis regeneration sequence one of Patrick's offspring begins to regenerate tentacles out of different orifices and they shoot up to the barn roof," said Maier. "For me integration is the way to cut down the time line and keep costs low. Integrating both 2D elements and 3D elements to come up with a solution tends to be the way to solve the thing. To go CGI you could spend six months and still not see anything you're happy with. For us it's been about how to make those two worlds work together to come up with a viable solution within a time line that makes sense." □

PRODUCER FRANK MANCUSO JR.

"This time around there's a lot of CGI in the movie but...it's more more doing stuff like landing on Mars and giving us a bigger feeling for the movie."

moment in time it wasn't central to the movie. When she did commit, we made her more central to the movie."

Among Sil's trackers in the original were Dr. Laura Baker, played by Marg Helgenberger, and ex-marine Press Lennox, played by Michael Madsen. Both actors reprise their roles in the latest encounter. "I was approaching this movie more like an old serial then a traditional sequel," said producer Mancuso. "In RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK and then INDIANA JONES Harrison Ford was the same and maybe some other elements were the same, but it was a whole different story in a whole different place and a whole different time. Similarly with this movie I had fun working with [screenwriter] Chris Brancato just playing around with what would happen if they went back to Laura and said 'Okay, obviously the last time we tried this it didn't work out, so if you could have all the money in the world what would you do to make the experiment better? What would you need to get the information we want, but not put everybody at risk?' I thought that was an interesting place to start.

"Michael's character starts off in a completely different arena as well and they sort of coax him back. He doesn't know at the time that he's brought back onto this that Laura's involved. They sort of bump into each other at the beginning of the movie. It seemed fun to me to play around with those people because we have a sense of history with them."

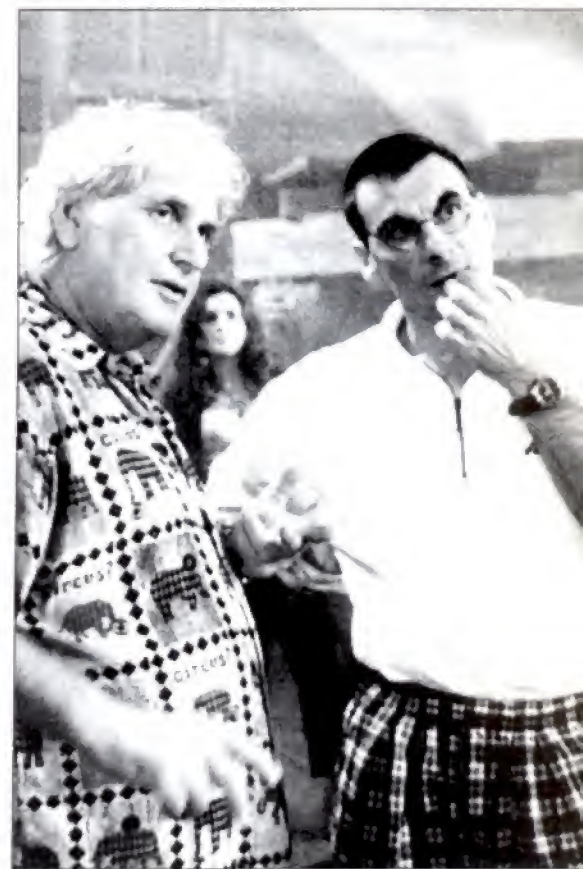
Mancuso knows that other venues for the film—such as cable, pay per view and video rentals—dramatically expand the audience and revenue possibilities for sequels and franchises. "The number of videos that [SPECIES] moved was disproportionately high compared to the theatrical gross," said Man-

cuso. "So that was an indication that they liked the movie and they went out and rented it again. The ratings that we got while it was on the pay channels were also good."

Sil, the H.R. Giger-designed star of SPECIES, was killed at the end of that film. But the return of Henstridge does not mean that Sil is back; the actress plays Eve, a laboratory specimen created from recombinant DNA. She is kept imprisoned in a high-tech facility, while scientists probe her to develop weapons that would be effective against her alien race.

"The Sil character of the first movie exists in a different incarnation in this movie," said Mancuso, "but in her monster state she's similar. The design has been changed, but is basically the same. As with the first movie, Giger has done a lot of work designing the Patrick monster. Giger draws his designs and hands them over to [creature effects supervisor] Steve Johnson and then Johnson

Frank Mancuso, Jr., who produced the original and its sequel, confers with director Peter Medak on the set.



SPECIES 2

WRITING THE SEQUEL

Chris Brancato creates a follow-up that stands alone.

By Dan Scapperotti

Writer Chris Brancato first set foot on the road to SPECIES II when he landed an assignment to write an episode for the first season of THE X FILES. The result was "Eve," the story of two little girls, murderous genetic replicants, who simultaneously kill their fathers on separate coasts. Suddenly, Brancato found doors swinging open for him, especially in science fiction. He was hired as story editor on the new Canadian based version of THE OUTER LIMITS. He also found time to write the episodes "Resurrection," about two androids who try to create the second dawning of mankind, and "Beyond the Veil," about a man who is thrown into a psychiatric hospital for people who think they were abducted by aliens.

After the show's second season, Brancato wrote HOODLUM, starring Laurence Fishburne for United Artists. Brancato then heard the studio was looking for potential writers for

Screenwriter Chris Brancato, veteran of both THE X-FILES and OUTER LIMITS.



Natasha Henstridge as Eve with director Peter Medak. From the beginning, screenwriter Chris Brancato pushed to have Henstridge back for the sequel as an essential element of the film.

SPECIES II. After several meetings with Greg Foster, an executive at MGM, and producer Frank Mancuso Jr, Brancato got the job, an assignment he credits to his X-FILES and OUTER LIMITS background.

Although his range of interests extends to science fiction, horror, gangster stories and romantic comedies, Brancato doesn't claim to be an expert in the genre. "I'm not deeply literate in terms of science fiction movies or literature," he said. "In some ways I think that's been helpful because I've had to approach certain science fiction projects much like the average viewer or reader. I'm not filled with knowledge about things scientific, so I have to do a lot of research and struggle very, very hard to make sure I understand this. In doing that, I believe that the scripts end up being carefully researched and understandable to the non scientific viewer."

In the opening moments of SPECIES II, the gleaming steel hull of a spacecraft moves into

view. Along the side are endorsements from Coca-Cola, Nike and McDonald's, sponsors who made the financing of the mission to Mars possible. While doing research for his script, Brancato wanted to gain a basic working knowledge of how a real life mission would evolve. He consulted Conrad Foster, a 30-year veteran scientist at NASA's Jet propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena. According to Foster, NASA said, "We could put a weather balloon on Mars or a land rover, but not a man. The space program is a very low government priority with little funding."

Jokingly, Brancato suggested that if NASA were planning a space mission to the Red planet today, Nike would probably sponsor it. Brancato mentioned the idea of making the Mars mission a corporate venture to director Peter Medak and they decided to incorporate that into the script. Since the film is about a space mission that goes terribly wrong, NASA wouldn't

give their permission to use their registered logo so Brancato and company had to come up with their own version.

"They're generally pretty willing to have their logo spread about," said Brancato of NASA, "but not when it's put in a negative context. I don't think they were too happy when one of their projects lands a terrible monster on this planet. Ours is called NSEG, the National Space Exploratory Group. This is a consortium of businessmen and scientists who have funded this thing together. So it became almost a matter of necessity to suggest that this wasn't a governmental agency that sent up this mission."

Counting ALIEN RESSURRECTION, two of designer H. R. Giger's creations are heading back to the big screen within six months of each other and Brancato offered his views on them. "In my opinion, SPECIES [2] is a curious blend of true science fiction with a kind of camp humor," he said. "ALIEN [RESSURRECTION] is a very serious, gloomy piece of science fiction horror. What makes SPECIES interesting is that we can kind of wink and grin at it. It is a very sexy science fiction movie and in some ways that's its greatest appeal. I felt that SPECIES II should keep that same sort of sly sense of humor that kind of pokes fun at sexual mores. In SPECIES II you have Patrick the astronaut going into a supermarket to try and pick up a woman. We have some fun playing with conventions of sex and dating situations that we are all familiar with and playing the horror of the situation as well."

As with director Peter Medak, the author credits producer Frank Mancuso as a major

PRODUCER FRANK MANCUSO JR.

“We’re spending money, but we’re only going to be here once, and nobody gives you a prize for coming in under schedule and under budget if it’s a lousy movie.”



Astronaut-turned-alien Patrick Ross stocks a deserted barn outside Washington with his alien offspring, the setting for a climax Brancato considered staging in the Lincoln Memorial.

contributor to the finished product. “I can’t over emphasize Frank’s contribution here,” said Brancato. “I came to the studio and pitched a couple of ideas for SPECIES II. I suggested there would be two beautiful women, but Frank said, ‘If we’re going to do another movie, let’s do something different. Something that’s not predictable. Let’s not have the rat come back and bite people. Let’s not have two beautiful women fighting each other. Let’s try to come at this in a way that’s different and smart. Lets do a movie that stands on its own merits and doesn’t need a SPECIES I to exist. Through the whole writing process Frank was a force for good, he was the keeper of the flame and challenged me to come up with smarter things and to push the envelope.”

Another issue Brancato and Mancuso wanted to address was the status of celebrity in the country. What is it like to be *People’s* sexiest man alive. “Lets have sly, satirical references to the fact that if you are a celebrity in this country it is utterly conceivable that women will throw themselves at you,” said Brancato. “What a perfect premise for a movie where if the monster has sex with any of these women the world could ultimately end. We thought it was a great way to avoid having a horrible rapist character and also make a commentary about the country we live in right now.

“The nice thing about this movie, of course, was that we were able to figure a way to

bring back Natasha Henstridge. To me that was an essential ingredient. I spoke to Frank straight away and I said whatever it takes let’s please try to get this woman back. Another beautiful woman just won’t do and we could have a lot of fun with it.”

Dialogue for Henstridge’s Eve character, which stands for Extraterrestrial Vulnerability Experiment, proved the most challenging for Brancato to develop. “They’re trying to find out what these creatures are vulnerable to,” he said. “The hardest thing is writing dialogue for an alien because who the hell knows what an alien talks like.”

Brancato originally had visions of staging the climax inside the Lincoln Memorial. “We would be fighting for American freedom right inside the symbol of American freedom,” he said. “It was a little too on the nose. We couldn’t film a movie like this directly in the Lincoln Memorial even though there’s all this great space in there to do it and frankly it would have played silly.

“For the most part these movies are about creating a really cool pace and bringing us from set piece to set piece, increasing the tension until we’re on the edge of our seats. Like the first movie I wanted to create a villain who is pitiable and make sure we build to a final set piece that really worked. The worst thing that could happen would be for the two of them, Eve and Patrick, to have sex.” □

gives those drawings a three dimensional look and we all sort of work together so that we feel pretty good about it.”

Complaints poured-in over the CGI monster effects in SPECIES, and Giger himself was less than pleased with the result. “Ultimately creature effects movies require interaction with human beings for them to really be effective I think,” said the producer. “What’s clear about the nature of the two processes is that CGI does certain things extremely well. Things that you couldn’t do any other way, however when you get close, when you get tactile with the creatures, it can’t be CGI. It has to be some level of a prosthetic creature so that the actor has a level of physical interaction with the creature.

“This time around there is a lot of CGI in the movie but it’s taking a different form. It’s not so much the Sil creature of the first movie, it’s more doing the stuff like landing on Mars and giving us a bigger feeling for the movie.

Part of the decision to eschew CGI for the creature effects owes to Giger’s own displeasure with the look of CGI in the first film. “It’s hard enough to get him to be happy with a prosthetic character that you’re creating,” said Mancuso about working with the Swiss designer. “Then when you have all these people involved in CGI animating this thing and [selecting] the color tiles, it’s very, very difficult. Everyone brings their own interpretation to these drawings and they’re saying ‘Well that looks pretty close.’ Pretty close just doesn’t cut it with Mr. Giger. Pretty close isn’t even in the same sport never mind the same league. You have to be very specific. Making it real time put a lot more of the movie in our control. We could light it the way we wanted to and we could cut out the slime

where we wanted to and when we wanted to.”

Steve Johnson had so impressed Mancuso with his work on the first film that the producer contracted him for the follow up. “I find him to be very easy to work with, very clear, and he knows Giger,” said Mancuso. “Steve is very production savvy that effects don’t work in a vacuum, they have to work on the set. They have to work efficiently on a set. We’re not going to spend all the time and money that we spend and be ready and then have these things break down when they get here. He really is very hands on and makes sure everything is all right.”

As producer, Mancuso feels that his biggest challenge is walking the line between fiscal responsibility and artistic integrity. “We’re spending money, but we’re only going to be here once, and nobody gives you a prize for coming in under schedule and under budget if you come up with a lousy

Mars astronauts Dr. Ann Sampas (Myriam Cyr) and Patrick Ross (Justin Lazard), infected by alien DNA.



movie," he said. "So you're constantly trying to figure where to spend the money and where it makes the most sense to place all of your emphasis. As a producer, for me the task is making sure that every dollar that gets spent is the best way that you know how to spend it. Ultimately all your decisions aren't as good as they should be, but you know on average we've done pretty well."

Looking toward the future, Mancuso stressed that he has tried to make the second entry in the series sufficiently distanced from the first to insure a continuing spiral in the SPECIES franchise. "With this movie I've chartered, I think, a broad enough move away from the first movie to not sort of pigeon-hole us into making the same movie over and over again," he said. "I did the FRIDAY THE 13TH movies and the basic drill was you sort of get ten more kids and come up with ten different ways to kill them and then go off and do it. It was the same movie done over and over again until people stopped going. When we started doing this movie I wanted to think about it in a different way."

The endless possibilities of DNA combinations and what becomes of these hybrid beings could propel the series into the next century. "That's an interesting enough idea that you can take it in different directions where you could come up with a few interesting stories without going back to the same set with the same girl. She didn't really die in the last movie, she's fine. There was a moment when we toyed with the idea of not doing a sequel to SPECIES at all because it was so different that it could be a completely different movie. But when Natasha and Marg and Michael wanted to do it and we realized that we could do things from the first movie a hundred times better in the second one, we decided to go out and do it."

Although the choice of director Peter Medak may seem odd, Mancuso was firm in his commitment to the Hungarian filmmaker. "For me it was an easy choice," said Mancuso,

PRODUCER FRANK MANCUSO JR.

"I did the FRIDAY THE 13TH movies and the basic drill was, you get ten more kids and come up with ten different ways to kill them...I wanted to think about it in a different way."



Marg Helgenberger as Dr. Baker learns that Eve (Natasha Henstridge), her alien test subject, is the best hope of tracking down the infected astronauts before they set up a breeding sanctuary that could end the human race.

"because the screenplay was as good as it was we had probably ten people who wanted to direct this movie. We had a lot of different meetings with a lot of different people. Some people from the effects genre, some people from the horror world and some people from straight movies who wanted to do this kind of movie and really loved the script. I met with Peter and admired a couple of his movies a lot. I loved THE KRAYS and THE CHANGELING, which I saw when I was younger. I thought ROMEO IS BLEEDING was terrific. He certainly got the sexiness. I knew he understood that part. He just came in and basically told me that he was dying to make this movie. He saw the movie in his head. He talked about what he saw and it was very, very close to the movie that I wanted to make. He had made, in my view, some legitimately great movies. And to have someone with his gifts to bring them to this movie to me was just a simple choice."

As Medak is quick to admit, science fiction is not his usual forte and he is not a great fan of the genre. However, he was im-

pressed by Chris Brancato's script and saw it as a good suspense thriller. Recalling his 1979 film THE CHANGELING, a ghost story that starred George C. Scott, Medak decided to sign on to the project. "This gave me a very good basis to do a very scary story," he said, "because most of the scripts one reads one just throws out the window in two seconds. This really grabbed me."

Since the action takes place in the Washington-Baltimore area, and both Medak and Mancuso were familiar with the region, they decided to shoot on location and in local studio space. Although smaller studios were available, they were insufficient for the mammoth sets required for Eve's habitat and a three-story barn. The production located an abandoned General Electric plant in Columbia, Maryland that was being converted into a Costco warehouse. The huge facility was ideal to house the sets and production offices. Medak hired Yugoslavian production designer Miljen "Kreka" Klakovic to create the sets.

In the warehouse, they con-

structed Dr. Laura Baker's experimental station, which includes Eve's glass-walled living quarters. Leading off the main lab is a series of blue corridors which run past elevator banks and office doors with security locks. Nearby stands the three story barn where Ross stores his chrysalis and awaits the final confrontation with Eve. To the right of the main structure is a duplicate of the barn's third floor to make camera rigging easier at ground level. The details are exact right down to the hay on the floor and cracks in the walls.

Although the return of Natasha Henstridge was a given when Medak signed on, the director quickly discovered that the actress was more than just a pretty face. "I found Natasha Henstridge just wonderful," he said. "When I saw SPECIES the first time I was amazed at how good she was. Being beautiful is one thing, but she is also quite a wonderful actress. I think she will show it when she's given other possibilities. There she was totally obsessed and possessed about reproducing. The interesting thing here is that everyone is going to expect her to be the central focus of the film. Everyone probably is going to be waiting for her to take her clothes off, which she hardly does in the movie. I think that is wonderful. Everyone else does, but not her. It's a very clever sequel because it stands on its own and it doesn't have that much to do with the first film. You think you're seeing a space adventure film at the beginning. I think it's kind of a wonderful interwoven horror-thriller."

As the first manned spaceship to Mars takes up orbit around the planet, a module detaches itself and lands on the surface. Astronaut Patrick Ross plants the American flag. Over a hundred actors auditioned for the pivotal role of Ross, the astronaut who, through no fault of his own, is gradually turning into something more than human. For the role of the new American hero, Mancuso and director Peter Medak cast newcomer Justin Lazard. This is the actor's second foray into feature films having appeared in Paul Morris-

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SPECIES 2

XFX EFX

Steve Johnson gives life to new alien creatures.

By Dan Scapperotti

One of today's top wizards of illusion is Steve Johnson who heads Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc. The special effects honcho has become a mogul of the industry with his Burbank company working on such films as *MEN IN BLACK*, *THE ABYSS*, *BATMAN RETURNS* and *SPHERE*, and his Canadian subsidiary, the Northwestern Effects Group turning out special effects for a trio of cable shows, *THE OUTER LIMITS*, *POLTERGEIST* and *STARGATE*. Based on his work on *SPECIES*, producer Frank Mancuso, Jr. brought Johnson on board his *SPECIES II* project as creative effects coordinator as soon as Chris Brancato finished his rough script.

"The movie has about three times the effects of the first one," said Johnson. "If there was a general mandate on this film it was to shy away from any computer generated characters. I was brought in to pretty much design all the effects sequences in the film."

Not an easy task. Since most writers today realize that almost anything is possible using CGI, they allow their imaginations to run riot. But Johnson found the challenge fun. Using a combination of script doctoring and his own fertile imagination, he developed ways to bring to the script images to life. "I think we ended up with much better work as a result of that," said Johnson, "because I had to approach things in a non-linear way. I had to come up with ways to do the same things without CGI and that was very, very difficult."

Mancuso's dictate to avoid CGI whenever possible was born out of a realization that today the process may have been over-used with too many producers hopping aboard the CGI bandwagon just because it's hip. The new film boasts two alien creatures, Eve, a new incarnation of Sil from the first film and the Patrick alien, played by Natasha Henstridge and Justin Lazard. Johnson had to create lifelike human replicas of the actors, as well as their alien forms.

XFX made a nude, full-size,

Patrick begins to transform, love puppet by XFX. Right: Lead prosthetic designer Dave Snyder (l) and sculptor Hiroshi Katagiri with clay sculpt.



Justin Lazard as Patrick watches as his son begins to form a chrysalis. Inset: The Chrysalis Boy suspended from an inverted section for green screen filming of the barn floor, articulated silicone puppet designed by Adrian Morot, cosmetics by David Dupuis.



full-figure animatronic model of Lazard for the scene where he makes love to a pick-up and starts to transform. "Making love to a live actress, you can compare the two in the shot," said Johnson. "That's a pretty tall order if you think about it. I was nervous about it all the way up to the point where the cameras rolled. But when the first shot was done [director] Peter

[Medak] and I were watching it on the video monitor, our jaws were both hanging open and I thought 'Wow.' We had a full hollow body to put our mechanics in for the erupting tentacles, but it made it very difficult because of the absolute realism required. I'm real pleased the way it turned out, though."

The camera angles, however, precluded exclusive use of the dummy, and Lazard was required to participate in the love scene. When the camera was moving, Johnson tried to shoot only the side of the dummy's face and concentrate on the body. Shooting over its shoulders and back looking at the actress, Raquel Gardner, with the tentacles coming out of his back.

"We wanted to do the reverse of that as well, over the actress and up to Justin's face," said



Johnson. "So the way to settle that was to marry the animatronic dummy with the live actor. We attached a tentacle pack to his back so that when we shot her point of view looking up at him we'd have the qualities of a live actor. Raquel was a little iffy at first, but let me tell you something, she was digging it by the time we finished. She was a real trooper because this thing was pretty much making love to her. She's nude during all of this."

To satisfy designer H. R. Giger, Johnson produced two versions of Patrick. The Swiss artist always felt that Patrick should be a male version of Sil. Basically a Gigeresque translucent, humanoid shape. Johnson, however, had other cinematic plans. "From the beginning I disagreed with him," said Johnson, "and Frank Mancuso agreed with me as well as Peter Medak. We felt that we had a chance here in the finale to blow the audience away with a creature that's never been seen before. Something really, really amazing. So in order to satisfy both what we felt was necessary for the script and Giger, we did two versions. The human version and then the fighting version. The way we justified that is that during the love-making transformation scene both Eve and Patrick are human versions of Giger characters. Eve being Sil from the first film and Patrick being a male version of Sil. We then worked with Giger to design something Gigeresque [for the fighting Patrick] that would be much more terrifying and much bigger and much more of a climactic image."

The fighting Patrick is six feet tall on all-fours and twelve feet tall when it raises up on hind legs. The operator inside an a fling rig is fitted with leg extensions and operates the arms like a rod puppet at the creature's elbows. The operator's own arms and the rods are removed computer graphically.

Noted Johnson, "What we end up with is something completely inhuman in shape, enormous in size and translucent and I think it's really going to screw with the audience because they're not going to know how it's operated."

In the first film a monster suit was used for quick cuts of

EFX CHIEF STEVE JOHNSON

"We felt we had a chance to blow the audience away in the finale with a creature that's never been seen before. I think it's really going to screw with the audience..."



XFX supervisor Steve Johnson (center) directs the filming of David Matherly's animatronic bifurcating tongue for Patrick's "French Kiss from Hell."

Sil and a puppet was introduced for closer shots. Finally, CGI was brought in for full body and ambulatory shots. For SPECIES II with its built-in restrictions on CGI, Johnson again made a series of puppets for close ups, but for Eve's transformation scenes and the final confrontation with Patrick, he augmented those with a woman in a suit. But Johnson wasn't satisfied to just work with human proportions.

"We extended her arms slightly," he said. "We actually extended her head. The character's head is thrown up and forward so she's got a much longer neck. We can see through the face and see the bones under the face. The most interesting thing we did was build the suit in a way where it really looked like the puppet. Instead of going with standard foam rubber we used silicon for the suit so it would be translucent and then we used vacuum-form shells in key areas so you could really get a great degree of translucency. We hired a very, very thin actress, Monica Staggs, in order to build out the torso so it wouldn't look too big.

"Then we'd get the translucency of a six inch deep empty

cavity that we could shoot light through. So we have a series of silicon and translucent vacuum formed shells that make the actress in the suit look like the puppet. We extended her head, we extended her arms and then, most interestingly, we extended her legs. We brought in a prosthetician who makes prosthetic legs for people who lost a leg. We had him make stilts for the actress with pointed toes and we cast her feet with the legs pointing down and then extended her legs 10-11 inches and built feet below that. She was able to walk on these without any type of flying harness and what it did was give her a very inhuman shape. A very supermodel, sexy kind of look.

To help maintain character continuity, Johnson hired Pons Mar, a movement coordinator, to do the creature casting. Mar held auditions and delivered videotaped interviews to Johnson. The candidates were brought in for second and third call backs until Staggs and Vincent Hammond were selected for the Eve and Patrick roles respectively. Mar trained with the suit actors throughout the entire process of building the suits and actually

directed their movements on the set.

The effects staff of 130 had only ten weeks to prep the production. Less time than on the first film, with three times the work. "On the first film Giger was brought onto the film before I was," Johnson said. "In this case I was on the film for about two months before Giger was. Considering the short lead time, I had to get started, so I'd done reams of designs and started the preliminary work before he started giving us designs. It was a much more collaborative working relationship this time because we kind of had to go in the direction that I had already started, based on our time restraints. Just as we did on the first show a lot of faxes and phone calls went back and forth. At one point Giger did come out for about a week to basically iron out the look of the final Patrick creature. He worked it into something that he was pleased with."

When shooting commenced on the East Coast locations, Johnson packed up fifteen of his key staff including Chris Nelson, who was the on set supervisor, and transplanted them to Maryland where they set up a studio in Columbia to maintain the effects and get the new effects ready for shooting.

A *tour de force* sequence takes place in a Washington hotel room but was actually shot on a small soundstage in Baltimore. Minutes after having sex with Patrick Ross, a debutante goes into the bathroom. Suddenly her body is wracked with pain and she crashes to the floor next to the toilet as her stomach swells dramatically. She is about to give birth to an alien baby. A bladder under a foam appliance allows the pregnancy to develop rapidly on camera, filming a nude, full-body dummy attached to performer Nancy LaScalascala's head. Johnson designed the abdomen to open up like a flower for the alien birth.

The small bathroom set was built with a hole cut in the back wall. Behind the wall actress LaScala laid down with her head and arms protruding through the cut out section. The nude dummy, sans head and arms, created from her body mold, is stretched out on the floor. Makeup personnel blend her head to the dummy

torso. A dozen or so staff members handle the off camera controls which work the legs, four petal sections which open in the belly, and the alien baby that is thrust out of the opening. LaScala must get into the moment as on cue she throws her arms forward and screams as the baby bursts forth.

Patrick's other alien offspring are gathered in a three story barn on his father's estate. They are in chrysalis form ready to emerge like butterflies. This posed one of the most challenging sequences for Johnson. In SPECIES, the young Sil goes into a chrysalis to emerge later as the adult played by Natasha Henstridge. "In this film we have 40 chrysalis working at the same time over three levels of a barn," said Johnson. "Basically what we had to do to get these chrysalis operating was to work day and night shifts for a week and bring that set to life. Every inch of the set is living. It's a pretty amazing sight. When I watched the dailies I got as excited as a little kid. It's not something we sculpted, molded and then mechanized. We fabricated them out of heat manipulated plastic and we operate them with positive and negative air flow for a more organic look. They all had to be ready to die when sprayed with the substance that kills them. Once they die we have a vacuum that sucks them down as well as tentacles that shoot out that are motivated once again by air so tentacles start flailing as they start to shrivel up."

Sex is an important ingredient in the SPECIES films, since the motivational force is procreation. The defining moment which could spell doom for mankind is if Eve and Patrick mate. Their offspring would be unstoppable. It took Johnson four months to convince Medak



Patrick's fighting transformation, animatronic puppet by XFX. Below: The clay sculpt prior to final head design (l), animatronics designer Clint Lynch demonstrates early neck, spine and foreleg assembly; Todd Minobe and Brian Roe rig Vincent Hammond in unpainted vacuform shell (r), construction supervised by Dan Rebert.



and Mancuso that his planned transformation of Eve and Patrick would work. Even then the director and producer were skeptical. "They didn't believe me until we saw dailies after the first day of shooting when I got a standing ovation," said Johnson. "We had to show both Justin and Natasha from humans transform into Giger versions of themselves to set up the

whole end sequence," said Johnson.

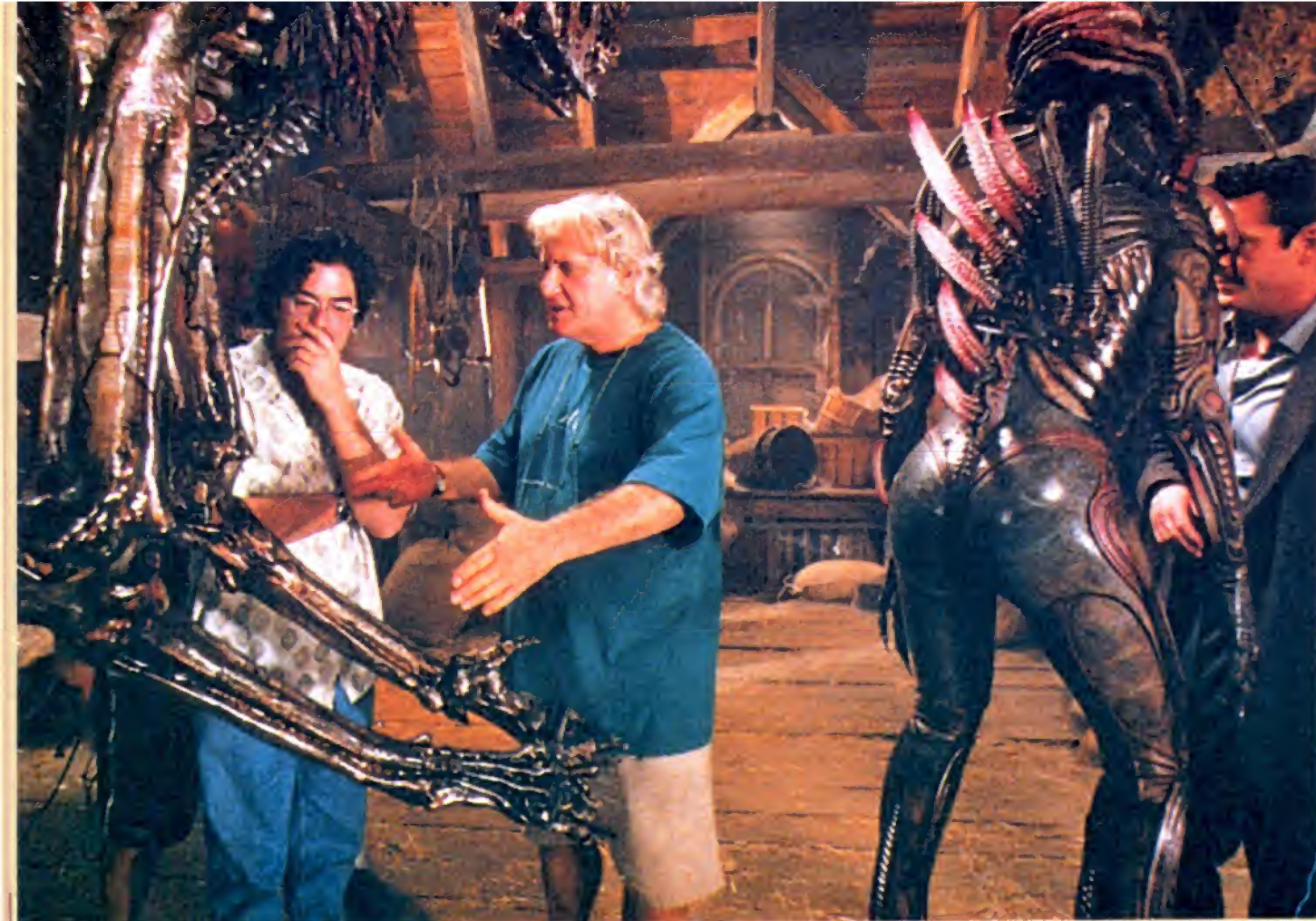
Johnson filmed the transformation without CGI by designing the Giger body parts with a translucent shell in human form. Johnson filmed under water and filled up the body parts through holes in the Giger design with an opaque, flesh-colored liquid. "When we reversed the film we started out

with a normal looking human leg and then the skin begins to crawl and becomes less and less opaque," said Johnson. "Then tiny worm like things retract into the pores of the Giger leg and you end up with the Giger leg. It's really a brilliant effect. The fact that it's in water gives it zero gravity which is fantastic."

Johnson shot the entire mating scene under water. "I wanted to give it a real ethereal look," he said. "What we gained by that is that we've got zero gravity. We have tentacles that are motivating themselves

Debutante Nancy LaScala gives alien birth, body prosthetic and alien baby sculpted by Greg Smith, animatronic design by Eric Fiedler and Bob Newton, cosmetics by David Dupuis and Tom Kileen. Left: Smith sculpts. Right: John Weldy test fits the appliance.





XFX supervisor Steve Johnson (l) and director Peter Medak confer on the set with the Patrick quadruped and Eve. Right: Monica Staggs tests prosthetic leg extensions and vacuum activated hair. Below: Eve's transformation leg with flesh colored fluid injectors for reverse filming.



through water. We also set up alternating strobe lights behind the creatures and in front of them so there's a constant barrage of weird lighting. As these creatures are having sex and floating you're getting flashes of light that show the skeletons inside of them. Anytime you shoot underwater it's a nightmare and we shot that sequence for four days. The sequence was probably a series of fifteen effects as well as the full body human size animatronic versions of Eve and Patrick."

The film offered Johnson an opportunity to design all the effects sequences from the project's inception. He was one of the first on board and was instrumental in hiring the digital effects crew from Digital Magic. Johnson also worked with them in designing sequences and was involved in the decision-making process of where best to use CGI. "It's probably the most intensive experience I've ever had," said Johnson who is scheduled to make his directorial debut on an episode of *THE OUTER LIMITS*.

"I was involved in rewriting

the effects sequences in the script throughout, to make them as good as they possibly could be. Chris Brancato, the writer, myself and [producer] Frank Mancuso, Jr. and [director] Peter Medak literally pulled out our pens and paper from day one and took the initial script and rewrote the effects scenes to the point where they were cutting-edge. It was a wonderful experience because only I knew what would be possible or earth shattering with the time and monetary restraints. So it was as good an experience as you could ask for in that respect because I was offered *carte blanche* to do what I wanted to a large degree."

One effects scene not in the original script was Patrick's attempt to deliver a "death kiss"

to Mary Helgenberger as Dr. Baker. Unlike the scene in the original, Johnson designed Patrick's tongue to split into two pieces to force Baker's mouth open, while another tongue inside forces its way down her throat. Johnson used a series of animatronic heads and tongues to film the scene.

Actor James Cromwell as Patrick's father, Senator Ross, comes to a bloody end courtesy of his son. In a confrontation with his father, Patrick shoots a tentacle out of his belly and it goes into Cromwell's stomach. Johnson wanted to give the gag an added twist. "We cut to James Cromwell's face," he said. "A little blood starts trickling out of his mouth and a tentacle bursts out of his throat as if it's weaved its way

through his entire innards and come out of his throat." Johnson married the actor's head to an animatronic body and tentacle for the effect.

Reverse motion and an upside-down set added wonder to the shot of a young boy transforming into a chrysalis, filmed live. "He's in a barn with a 20-foot ceiling," said Johnson. "We made a fully articulated silicone body of the boy. He looks up at the ceiling, his mouth opens and five twenty foot tentacles shoot out of his eyes, mouth and nose attach to the ceiling and pull the boy up into a fetal pose."

Johnson attached the silicone dummy to the ceiling, pulled out the tentacles and wrapped them around the camera and then pulled them back. "In reverse it looks as though you're on the ceiling looking down at the boy," he said. "As he tilts his head up these tentacles shoot out of his eyes, nose and mouth right towards camera. To take that a step further we shot that with a green background and then we composite the real actor. What we've got is something that will totally confuse the audience."

Johnson's company is currently working on *DOOMSDAY* and Brainiac's menagerie for Tim Burton's version of *SUPERMAN* and *HULK*, the big screen treatment of Stan Lee's green character. □

XFX cosmetic designer Tom Kileen with animatronic alien baby understructure. Kileen was part of a staff of 130 who spent 10 weeks preparing for effects filming.



sey's SPIKE OF BENSON-HURST. Both Medak and Mancuso point to the ill-fated Larry Talbot, the wolfman, as the inspiration for Ross.

"Justin came in the first or second day," Medak remembered. "I sort of fell in love with his sort of science fiction quality. He has just the right face that I wanted. He could turn from being the kind of all American hero who comes from an upper class American family one second and an instant later he could turn into an alien without us doing anything to him. He's got the most incredible eyes, which is the key to it. I thought his performance was the best out of everybody we looked at and tested. I noticed him immediately and began comparing everyone to him. Eventually we tested five people, including Justin, and it became obvious that he was the one, and fortunately Frank and everyone agreed with me."

"Although Justin Lazard is new," Mancuso added, "Michael T. Williams, George Dzundza and James Cromwell are also in the movie along with Madsen and Helgenberger. So there really is a good bunch of supporting people that we've surrounded Justin with the same way we did Natasha in the first movie."

Franc Mancuso is very much a hands-on producer. He is on set much of the time giving support and encouragement to cast and crew alike. "Most producers are never around," complained Medak, "and they're only around when they're yelling and screaming at the end of the day and have no idea what went on during the day. Frank has been very supportive and a great help. We both saw the same kind of movie and the casting was a pleasure, and everyone we've got in it is wonderful."

The supporting cast was very important to Medak and he took time to select the right actors. "I worked with James Cromwell, who plays Justin's father, when I did ROMEO IS BLEEDING before he became well-known because of BABE," Medak said. "It was very important to cast the right girls to play Justin's girlfriend and the debutantes."

DIRECTOR PETER MEDAK

"There's a lot of talk about things in pre-production...everybody just talks like there's no tomorrow. Just give me the hundred people and I'll set it up and we'll do it."



Justin Lazard as astronaut Patrick Ross, confers with director Peter Medak and producer Frank Mancuso, Jr., filming the ballroom celebration on his Mars return that sees the alien contamination spread to admiring debutantes.

As the alien desires that originally afflicted Sil begin to affect Ross, he seeks out suitable female mates. He meets a pair of Washington debutante sisters in a hotel ballroom and seduces them with horrifying results. Medak first cast California actress Raquel Gardner and then started to search for someone who would look like her sister. New Yorker Nancy LaScala, who won the role, had to undergo extensive prosthetic makeup in a rigorous ordeal for a scene where she gives birth to an alien offspring.

"They had to be perfectly right and they had to be very sexy and, at the same time, they had to act very well," said the director. "It's not just about being beautiful or being naked in certain scenes. Nudity is always difficult to film. I hate to impose on anybody or to force anybody to do anything, because the minute you do that it's never going to work. I explain it to them right at the being before they get hired what the scene requires. I suggest that they look at some of my movies to see what I did with Lena Olin or Glenda Jackson years ago. I did the same kind of stuff. As long

as it's done in a very classy way then it becomes acceptable. But if you just throw the camera at them when they're very vulnerable then it can become very cheap. The main thing is to be very honest about it and tell everybody exactly what I would like to get. If either one of them had objected to something I wouldn't have done it. I would have done something else."

The director plunged into one of the film's major set pieces on the first day of shooting. But, even that was treated as routine by Medak. Eve, driven by a desire to mate with Ross, breaks out of her research facility prison. The roofs are filled with sharpshooters, and helicopters prowl the night sky. Suddenly they open fire on the fleeing Eve. "There's about a hundred of them trying to stop her from getting out," said Medak, "and there's this big shootout. You just lay out your shots and you organize it. It's no more difficult then doing a scene with four people because it's all done to a certain vision or a shape. You kind of set it up and then you let it go so it becomes totally real. There's a lot of talk about things in pre-pro-

duction, but I found that nothing really happens until you're there. There are lots of conversations and lots of meetings. I find those things quite frustrating because everybody just talks like there's no tomorrow. Just give me the hundred people and I'll set it up and we'll do it. Because it has to happen in front of the camera. Shooting is my favorite, and the editing."

The director wasn't daunted by the wide array of special effects called for in the script, either. "I've never done anything with special effects before," said Mancuso. "It is a learning process but it lasts about a week," he said. "There is nothing to learn about special effects, it's just like filming anything else, you just have to apply a different mentality to it. Once you learn how certain things are done, you've got it. You have to wait and wait and wait."

The director worked closely with Steve Johnson on the effects and with the team from Digital Magic to coordinate the on-set and CGI effects. The Mars landing scenes were filmed in the rugged terrain of Utah. But he was frustrated by the fact that effects images are delivered at a later date. "The special effects people are very talented, but it's hard to get stuff from them," said Medak. "I can't tell what I want to do with it until I see it. We had endless conversations and meetings with them and tests. But nothing really means anything until you are actually there a moment before you do it. You see tests that don't really work and they tell you don't worry about that. You're always looking at things, but you're always guessing, and then the moment of truth comes and you have to be very clever to be able to come up with something which really works."

And what about subsequent sequels for Medak? "No," he said emphatically. "I really did this because the script was good. There are so many other things to make than remakes. As long as it's related to people and works on a realistic level then I don't mind doing them, but if it works only on a fantastic level then I'm not enjoying them at all." □

SPECIES 2

DESIGNER H.R. GIGER

The world's premier monster-maker on his art.

By Dan Scapperotti

Perhaps the most famous of film monster designers today is the venerated H. R. Giger whose creation of the ALIEN monsters and the Sil creature from SPECIES have become icons of modern science fiction. Giger is a man who takes his artistic integrity seriously. *Very* seriously. He is currently involved in a credit battle with 20th Century-Fox over his lack of screen recognition on the latest Alien film, ALIEN RESURRECTION. Fox apparently "forgot" the creature design credit for the Swiss artist, much like Andrew Lloyd Weber's oversight in failing to give credit to Gaston Leroux, the author of *Phantom of the Opera*.

Giger was vocally less than pleased with the CGI incarnation of his design of the Sil creature in SPECIES and was a bit surprised when producer Frank Mancuso, Jr. contacted him to work on the sequel. "I was happy to receive Frank's invitation to come back and work on SPECIES II," said Giger. "He is a thorough professional and only concerned about what is in the best interest of his film."

When director Peter Medak first signed onto SPECIES II one of his first questions for producer Frank Mancuso was, is H.R. Giger involved? The director, it turns out, was a big fan of the Swiss designer.

Their face-to-face meetings only lasted a week, but Medak was bombarded by Giger with a steady stream of design material. "He's got this incredible dark vision, particularly the Alien," said Medak. "He's done all kinds of other things. It's just that he's known for his ALIEN



Oscar-winning Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger (l) confers with XFX creature effects supervisor Steve Johnson over the design maquette of Eve, repeating Giger's original Sil design with slight modifications, sculpt by Nori Honda.

creatures. I had a great time with him. We spent endless time talking on the phone and he started sending lots of sketches and drawings. He did some of the designs which Steve Johnson then executed. I have 150 faxes from him of drawings which I'm keeping forever because I think he's a genius. He gave me designs of what the creature should look like and ideas for the transformation when the two creatures are making love to each other, the love scene. He also came up with ideas for when the tentacles shoot out of the little kid and he gets taken up into the ceiling of the barn and then goes into the chrysalises, the cocoon stage."

The love scene between the two alien life forms, Eve and Patrick, was brief but, Medak felt, pivotal to the story. "I wanted to make it very beautiful and idyllic," he said, "and kind of lyrical. Giger kept talking about the hair, which is kind of

floating around, and which then becomes tentacles and we go into the whole transformation of the creatures. He would send an idea and I would send it back to him and we'd talk a lot on the phone and eventually we came up with something incredible. It is a science fiction movie and that's what brings it to that world. Those two creatures. It was a very important part of it."

Putting the new creatures on screen was a joint effort between Steve Johnson and H.R. Giger—imagination linked to practicality. "It was a great combination working with the both of them," Medak said. "Steve has to put into practice what Giger puts on the page. They have to move and they have to function and they have to jump and attack. It's very difficult to work with creatures because once you get them together nothing actually works properly with staff people holding the arms up and things they have to take out. There are all

kinds of restrictions, but once you get the hang of it, it's quite an incredible medium to work in."

Mancuso sent Giger a copy of the script for the proposed movie and a contract to the designer's agent. "Because of the need for storyboards very early on in the pre-production, Steve Johnson's XFX was already on the job before I was even approached," said Giger. "Consequently, I think many decisions relating to certain design executions had already been made before I took on the assignment or even before I was approached to return. As an unfortunate result, by the time I was allowed to start my own work, I had to stay within certain parameters which had already been established.

Giger was disappointed not to have been brought onto SPECIES II earlier. "Steve Johnson, without question, is one of the best in fabricating articulated and animatronic creatures, but, I think, his work in this case would have been better served if he could have waited until I finished my designs rather than trying to get into my head and guessing at what he thought I would like to do.

"In the end, I was in the position of having to work on Steve's designs, not, strictly, on my own original ones. This is not what I do best, to make someone else's designs look 'Gigeresque,' or try to improve upon them. My ideal way of working is always the same. I start with a blank canvas. In the case of a film, I really have to start from the very beginning and develop the character in my own way, based upon the needs of the script."

Giger speculated that perhaps Mancuso wanted to estab-



Justin Lazard as Patrick watches as one of his alien sons begins to form his chrysalis. Right: Giger's concept of worms that knit to form the chrysalis.

SURREALIST H.R. GIGER

“Since we know each other well, [Mancuso] understands my compulsion to try and improve everything, a trait of mine which is not necessarily appreciated by everyone.”

Mancuso and [director] Peter Medak to see that a certain continuity of design is maintained from the first film to this one. During my work on the first film I had set down a unique template which provided the design aesthetic and the blueprints for others to follow, just as I had done for the first ALIEN film. For better or

cessity or an invitation requires it, I am available for a quick cross-Atlantic visit and I did spend several days in California with Medak, Mancuso and Steve Johnson and the animatronics people at XFX.”

On the first SPECIES film, Giger had little contact with director Ronald Donaldson, the addition of Peter Medak, whom

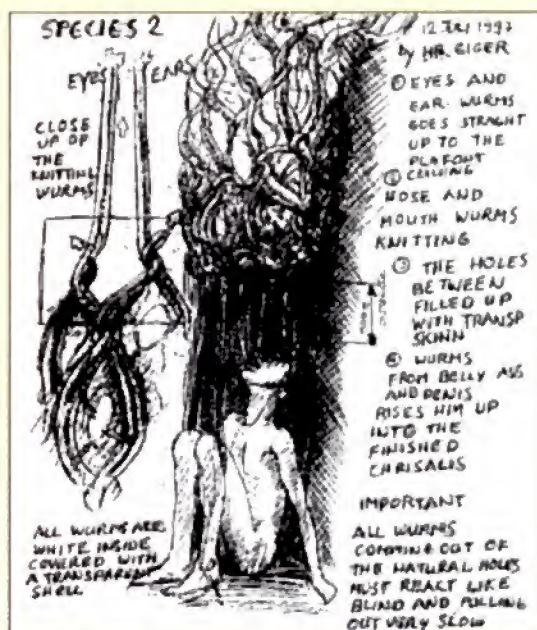
Giger admirers, to helm the new film was a major attraction for Giger. “The involvement of Peter Medak as the director of SPECIES II figured largely in my decision to accept MGM’s invitation to participate in the film,” confirmed the designer. “While Peter was too busy to visit me in Zurich we spoke often over the telephone and he also met with my agent in New York. It pleased me greatly that he is a gentleman from the ‘old school’ who extended to me the respect of a creative colleague and was genuinely interested in my

lish a design direction before Giger was involved. “So I would need to follow their ideas, mostly, instead of spending a lot of energy trying to change everything,” said Giger. “Since we know each other well, [Mancuso] understands my compulsion to try and improve everything, a trait of mine which is not necessarily appreciated by everyone. Still, he had the confidence, I think, that my involvement in his movie would, somehow, challenge the excellence level of the design and fabrications group.

“I think he appreciates my unique qualifications for a film designer. Not necessarily my Oscar, many others also have one, but the fact that I come from a fine arts tradition and a strong industrial design background. The maxims that I adhere to can be a nightmare come true for a lesser producer, that form follows function, not sen-

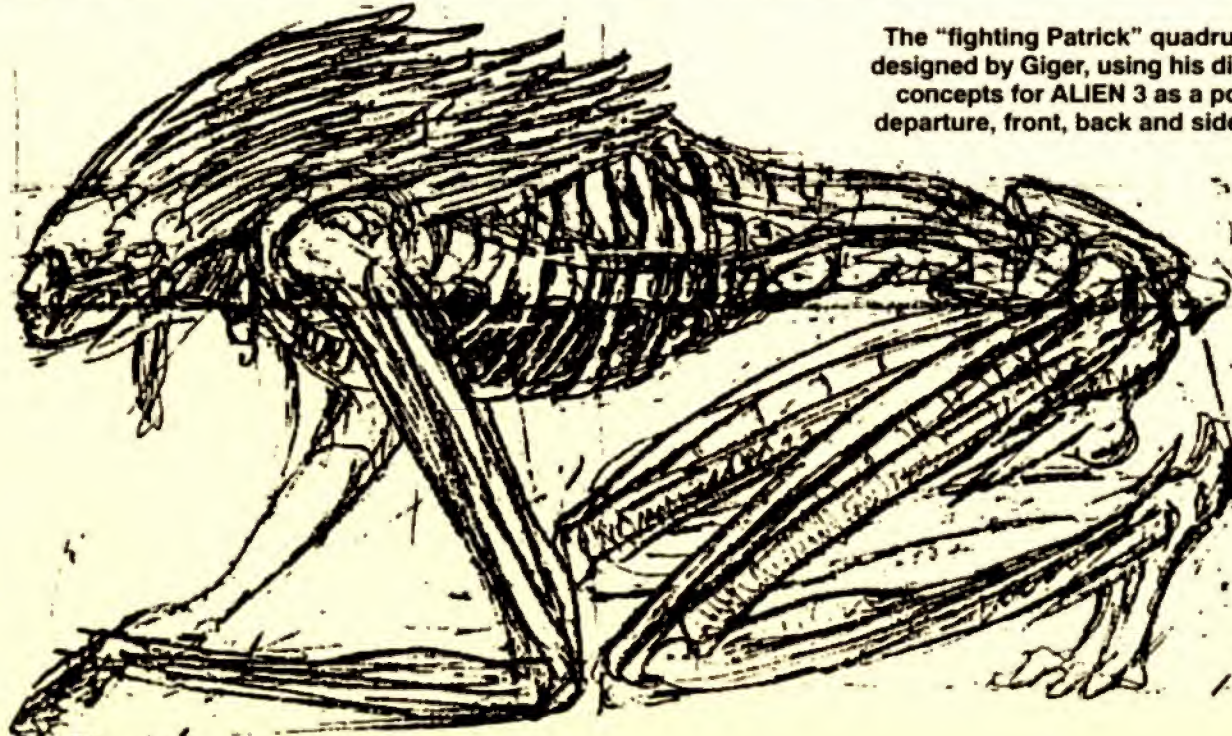
sation, and that getting it done on time must *not* be at the expense of getting it done right. The best of films will always have an individual who argues these unpopular points. In the long run, such people are good to have around for the health of the film, though not always for the health of the producer. So even though my ideas have not always prevailed, Frank will probably be the first one to admit that my ideas create a dynamic that, at the end, make a visible difference. And, at the end, that is all that matters. Only what is visible.”

Giger hadn’t seen the finished film when interviewed in Zurich. “I have good reason to hope that I was *not* brought into the project only because of the strong marketing value of my name, but because of the sincere desire on the part of Frank

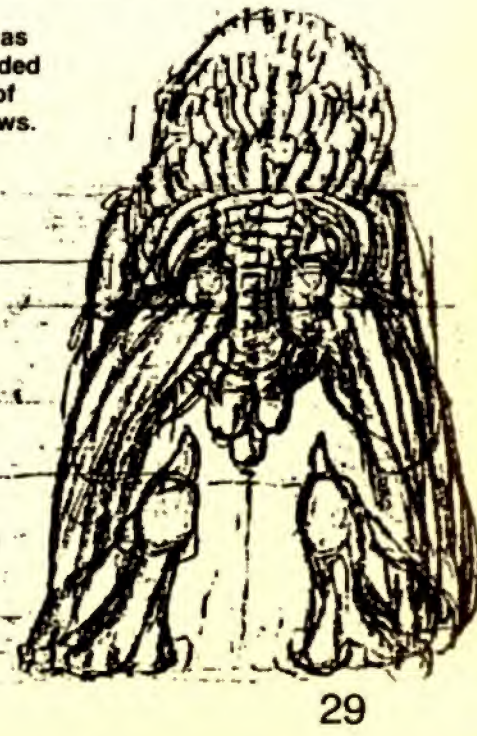


worse—this is the way it usually must be for me since I must remain, for the most part, in Switzerland, to be home and work on my other projects, and can not be on hand in Los Angeles for the amount of time it would take to personally supervise the laborious design and fabrication process. When ne-

ideas. Since I have not yet seen any of the actual footage he shot, I don’t know how much of my concepts he had been able to incorporate in the final film. I am confident though, that he did try his best to do so and was able to make the most of what was put in front of his lens by Frank Mancuso and



The “fighting Patrick” quadruped as designed by Giger, using his discarded concepts for ALIEN 3 as a point of departure, front, back and side views.



DIRECTOR PETER MEDAK

“I think [Giger] is an amazing artist.... Now that I know him I just hope that maybe one day I can do a movie that can utilize him and his kind of genius.”

Steve Johnson. It was an honor to finally be able to meet with Peter in Los Angeles. I am a great admirer of his films, Particularly the cult classic THE RULING CLASS and ROMEO IS BLEEDING. With Peter Medak at the helm as director and his unique ability to infuse dramatic tension into a scene he is capable of elevating the level of any script. It is also obvious from his past work that he can draw out amazing performances from his actors.

“Almost certainly, there will be surprises for me in SPECIES II which will not make me very happy, but I am sure that we will all be very surprised with the level of acting Natasha [Henstridge] will be able to achieve in the film under the guidance of Peter Medak. At this moment, Peter is working on the editing with all his soul, I am sure. He is a Hungarian, as is my agent, and Hungarians give it everything they’ve got!”

Working long-distance with Giger frustrated Medak who longs to have a closer working

Giger's detail of Patrick's son, showing how the knitting worms emerge from every natural orifice.



relationship with the artist. “I think he’s an amazing artist,” said Medak. “Very unique and I hope this is the beginning of us working together on some other things because I think he’s a total genius and original. Now that I know him I just hope that maybe one day I can do a movie that can utilize him and his kind of genius. I would do it totally with him instead of just having him on the other end of a fax. When you do the creature long distance a lot can change with the drawing and how it comes out. I can’t wait to do a ghost story and get him to come and help me to create certain things. What I know now about special effects and Giger and Steve, one can make the most incredible things.”

Giger was pleased with SPECIES II’s non-CGI approach, but doesn’t rule out use of CGI in the future. “The technological capability, for sure, has gotten even better since [SPECIES in] 1992, but I think only an elite few has gained full mastery of it,” observed Giger. “In the coming years this is sure to change. Until then, the needs of the script and the pockets of the studio should decide what will be the best methods to use for the visual effects. I was glad that this time Frank agreed that we should not rely so much on computers, but more on animatronic creations and live tricks before the camera which Steve Johnson and his crew did so well in the first film.”

Chris Brancato’s script doesn’t try to revive Sil from the dead. Instead he reinvents the half human, half alien creature in the form of Eve. Giger wasn’t asked to modify the design from the original. “The only correction I suggested was a minor, anatomical one,” said Giger. “If new molds were to be made, I hoped that her legs would be lengthened since they were made too short in the first film.

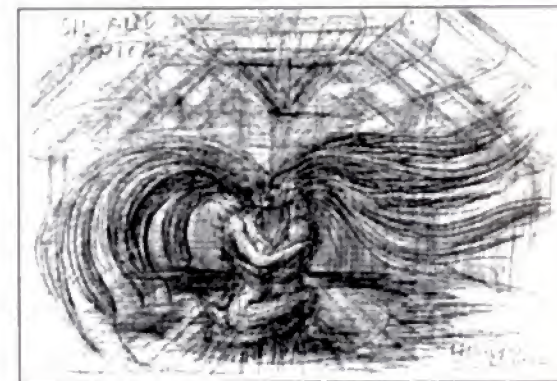


Giger's design sketch of Patrick showing how tentacles sprout from his head when he begins to mate with Eve. Below: Giger's designs show how Eve and Patrick's tentacles swirl together to form a nest.

Not until I read the press release did I realize I was supposed to have made a new design.”

Eve has a competitor in the new film in the form of a male of the species. Astronaut Patrick Ross infected with alien DNA on a mission to Mars returns to Earth and rapidly takes on the characteristics of another out-of-this-world creature. Some of the first sketches sent to Giger after he signed onto the project were of the transformed Patrick creature. “I didn’t know why it was even necessary,” said Giger of the design. “It seems to be derivative of the Alien monster, complete with the elongated skull, and with big eyes, and bird like legs, with that extra reverse-bending joint which seems to be the ‘design *de jour*’ in the Hollywood monster community. I understand the temptation to do this since it allows the creature to stand a foot taller than a normal person. The man inside the rubber suit can stand on high heels of a sort. Taken together with the creature’s oversize hands and long animal-like claws, it can come off rather clumsy looking. Whatever enhancements it brings to the creature’s imposing stature, it also sacrifices from it’s graceful and deadly elegance. I was in conflict over this approach with XFX and I had many animated discussions with Steve over the designs. In the end, I believe, XFX won out and got what they wanted.”

The seeming defeat, however, has not phased Giger. “This is not important,” he said. “What only matters is that the audience in the theatre should



not be disappointed. Once I realized I had to accept the Patrick monster written into the script, I argued very hard to try and improve the initial design. I realized that certain elements of my unused designs for ALIEN 3 could work, also, here. At the end, I think, I was able to bring some of these design ideas to the Patrick monster and improve him a little bit, which is what, I believe, Frank had hoped I would do.

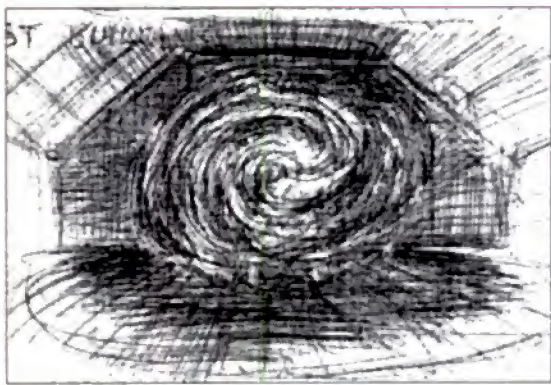
“I think I was successful, though, in injecting another stage to the Patrick transformation, a humanoid stage which

Giger love: his concept for the hair snakes for Eve and Patrick's mating.





Lennox (Michael Madsen) confronts the fighting Patrick quadruped, created by XFX from Giger's design. The filmmakers wanted this larger, more threatening monster for the finale, which Giger designed even if he felt the concept wasn't justified by the evolutionary logic of the established story.



basically would be the male adaptation of my original design for Sil. This was the Patrick I had envisioned for the love-making scene which takes place when Eve and Patrick finally merge before Patrick's full-blown horror transformation. I had advised from the start that this transparent Patrick creature be built as a full puppet. From what I had been told, unfortunately, it has been realized only from the waist up. Without legs and the possibility to show it in its entirety, Peter Medak must have been greatly limited in his possibilities to

shoot it with unrestricted creativity, due to the way the shot had to be framed.

"I have worked on enough films now to realize that nothing may quite satisfy me the way the original ALIEN film collaboration did. There, I was given the freedom to do everything myself, from the design to the actual physical sculpting. I made myself a prisoner on that film and, in fact, that is what is necessary to allow for the fulfillment of the successful evolutionary process known as creature development and design. I must have my hand on the creature from the beginning to the end or have a top sculptor or fabricator to work with me in the atelier in Zurich. Although filmmaking is, ultimately, a compromise between many creative sensibilities, it is advisable to start with a strong hand. It is the nature of dreams that they are never to be fully realized. In that sense, I sup-

pose, everything went according to plan."

Busy with his own artistic endeavors (such as the soon-to-open Giger museum), Giger picks and chooses his film projects very carefully. "There are a few films that are offered to me," he said, "and of those, there are very few that I would like to work on. Since a film project takes a year from one's life, even if you really work on it for only a few months, at this point I need to be very selective. Above all, it has to be a script which engages my imagination and also a topic which I could bring new ideas to. The human drama in a story is as important to me as the creatures. I have two stories of my own which I am working on. *THE CROSS AND THE BLADE* is a dramatic film idea without any monsters or creatures and *THE MYSTERY OF SANGOTTARDO* is, among other things, quite humorous."

Giger's latest book, published by Taschen, is www.HRGIGER.com, which is also the address of the film designer's new website. Noted Giger, "I am very proud of the many internet awards which this website has been given and also the work of Thomas Riehn, my WebMaster, who is mostly responsible for its existence. I could not have realized two years ago that it could become such an important means of communication and interaction with my fans."

Giger looks forward to the SPECIES series continuing. "I think Peter Medak will make a very good picture for Frank,

quite possibly even better than the first," said Giger. "My way of working results in a lot of ideas around a design, not all of which are used. Concepts which I did for the first may possibly be used in SPECIES II, or ideas designed for the second film may easily find their way into the third. This also happened with the ALIEN films. Even in the last one I can see where the Newborn originated, just look at page #60 in *Giger's Alien*. Eventually, most of my designs get used, one way or another. I can only hope that, when it happens, it is under my guidance so I could supervise the interpretation and the quality of the execution. It seems logical to me that it would be the best guarantee for everyone." □

Director Peter Medak rehearses Eve. Medak and Giger hope to collaborate again in the future.



XFX supervisor Steve Johnson (l) shows Giger an effects torso of Patrick when the artist visited the production. Giger worked mostly by fax from Zurich.



SPECIES 2

NATASHA HENSTRIDGE

The actress talks about her new alien role.

By Dan Scapperotti

Few screen personalities have had the impact that the lovely Natasha Henstridge had on theatre audiences when she appeared as Sil, the human-alien hybrid in *SPECIES*. Although her subsequent appearances in *ADRENALINE* and *MAXIMUM RISK* failed



Henstridge as Eve, a clone of the original's Sil, subjected to government experiments into her alien DNA. Inset: with captor/surrogate mother Dr. Laura Baker (Marg Helgenberger).

After appearing in only a few films, Henstridge finds herself in a sequel to one of the top-grossing films of 1995. "There are a lot of new elements," said Henstridge. "The fact that I got to be a good guy, and the fact that my character got to help capture the other alien was refreshing."

This is the first time the young actress has had to face an audience already familiar with her character. Or at least they think they are. "I think there are difficulties in doing a sequel as far as expectations are concerned," she said. "SPECIES made a lot of money. This one is a different character. I guess there's some fears it won't meet expectations. I think it's a stand alone story, even though it's a sequel. You don't have to have seen the first one to see this one. But if you had, it's even a little more interesting."

At first glance the characters of Sil and Eve appear to be very similar. Each was created in a laboratory setting and

each has the capacity to generate into an other-worldly creature. Henstridge feels that Eve is more complex.

"She realizes that she's human and alien," said Henstridge. "She knows the story of the first Sil. She understands all that. She's as human as you can be locked up in a cage your whole life and not having all the social skills that everybody else has. But she can revert to her alien nature. So there's a complete duality in her character. She's also at odds with herself. Even when she becomes the alien, her human side overrules. She's more human than alien in a lot of ways."

Reprising her role from the first film, actress Marg Helgenberger returns as Dr. Laura Baker in charge of the project that created Eve. "In some ways, I feel Marg is my mother, but in other ways I feel, even though I'm trapped in this cage, like I'm more powerful and I don't need her," said Henstridge. "But I'm also

the experimentee, so it only goes so far. She puts me through somewhat tortuous experiments.

Eve's sex drive—repressed to make her a safer guinea pig—is restored when she is given the assignment to capture Ross, the renegade astronaut infected with alien DNA on Mars. "When her sex drive is brought back she's like a cat in heat," said Henstridge. "She's sort of always battling that I guess. When she turns into the alien, she's much more clueless about that because she

never really had that before, so she's not used to it. She's more naive about the alien aspect than Sil."

When discussing the challenges of the role, Henstridge harks back to her worry over audience expectations. "It's weird," she said. "The only thing I can say as far as challenges are concerned is expectations. There are higher expectations now. If people saw the first one, they're wondering what I'm going to do with the second one, or how it's going to be different. If it's going to be exactly the same, are people just going to be bored? I guess in some ways the biggest challenge is trying to bring in the things that people liked about the first one while trying to make the new one as original as possible. They still want people to feel some connection to this character, even though it is technically a different character."

On *SPECIES*, the actress was a novice in front of the cameras which added to her



to capitalize on her potential, those close to her new film, including the famous designer H.R. Giger, predict a rekindling of her career.

In *SPECIES II*, the sequel to the enormously successful *SPECIES*, Henstridge plays Eve, a biological anomaly created to further the study of the strange race from beyond the stars. But, this time, she's not alone. For three years the lab-bred Eve has been a virtual prisoner in a high security facility where her body is explored for ways to combat the alien race from which she was derived. "I'm being studied in this habitat," said Henstridge. "It's the secret government thing. Coincidentally enough they have another problem with an alien. They come to ask me to help them track down the new alien."

NATASHA HENSTRIDGE

“The biggest challenge is trying to bring in the things people liked about the first SPECIES while trying to make the new one as original as possible.”

one, the way that I was in the first one. He's the star. Fabulous. He's a very nice guy. I think they did the same thing with me in the first one. It's hard for people to get into the character if it's played by a well-known star. If you're watching TV and you see people like Julia Roberts playing an alien who's never been human before you're thinking 'But she was PRETTY WOMAN' and she was this and she was that. With a star comes a lot of baggage. I think when you pick somebody who's unknown you're more inclined to believe that this person can really be from somewhere else. I think that was probably a smart thing that they did in Justin's case as well. I think he was probably just best for the part.”

Despite the rigors of creating her character and living and filming in Baltimore, an unfamiliar city, Henstridge managed to adapt. “I've been having a lot of fun,” she said. “Absolutely. Y'know doing these movies is always a certain amount of action and a certain amount of stunts and things like that. That's kind of fun for me. I love doing that kind of stuff. I really do. It's like going to the playground or something when you're a child.”

In the first film, Sil was able to quickly adapt to several situations because of information gleaned from watching television. That ability is also touched on in the new film. This time sporting tips come in handy. “My character learns a lot from television which is sort of a scary thing isn't it?” she said. “She's a child of the '90s, you could say. She watches some baseball, maybe the Orioles, since we're in Baltimore. She watches these fast ball pitchers and all that stuff. When she breaks out of her

habitat, she has learned how to pitch. So she knocks out one of the guards with her fast pitch. It's kind of funny. We wanted to do an insert shot of me throwing the baseball so you could actually see the baseball. So the cameraman gets right up there and says, 'Okay, I want you to throw the baseball right next to the matte box, right next to the camera.' I said 'Okay. I'll try.' So I grab the baseball and I literally hit the matte box, but the shot looks phenomenal. It looks so good. But I was horrified. The cameraman is standing behind the camera holding this thing. I almost threw it right down the center of the lens!” □

Alien guinea pig: Henstridge found Eve a more complex role than that of the original.

Henstridge as Eve, covered in sores and blisters, the subject of Nazi-like experiments by Baker to test the limits and vulnerabilities of her alien physiology.

performance as the virginal creature, a stranger in a strange land, driven by desires she doesn't understand. Now, after several films, Henstridge has reached a comfort level. “In a lot of ways, it's easier for me because, I'm a lot more used to it,” she said. “I hope it doesn't take away from the performance in any way being more used to being in front of the camera. I hope not. Anyway, I feel comfortable with myself.”

When the alien DNA infecting astronaut Patrick Ross, played by newcomer Justin Lazard, begins to insinuate its presence, Ross gets an overwhelming urge to procreate his alien race. Eve finds herself confronted with a series of new feelings and emotions. “I'm helping Laura and the other people out,” said Henstridge. “There's a certain time in the

script when I'm becoming telepathically connected to Patrick's character, who's my fellow alien. He starts to get involved with these other women. He's capturing these other women and raping them. I'm a little jealous of that, because we have this connection and I guess I'm sort of connected to him in that way, in a way that I can never be connected to any other human being.”

Although SPECIES II is Patrick's story, Henstridge's presence is felt throughout the film. The actress does not feel that the film is a star-driven vehicle. “It's really an ensemble piece, I think,” she said. “I don't think there's anybody in it really that much more than anybody else. I think I'm probably in it less than the rest of the actors. Patrick is a pretty prominent character in this



TARZAN

Could a real

By Scott Tracy Griffin

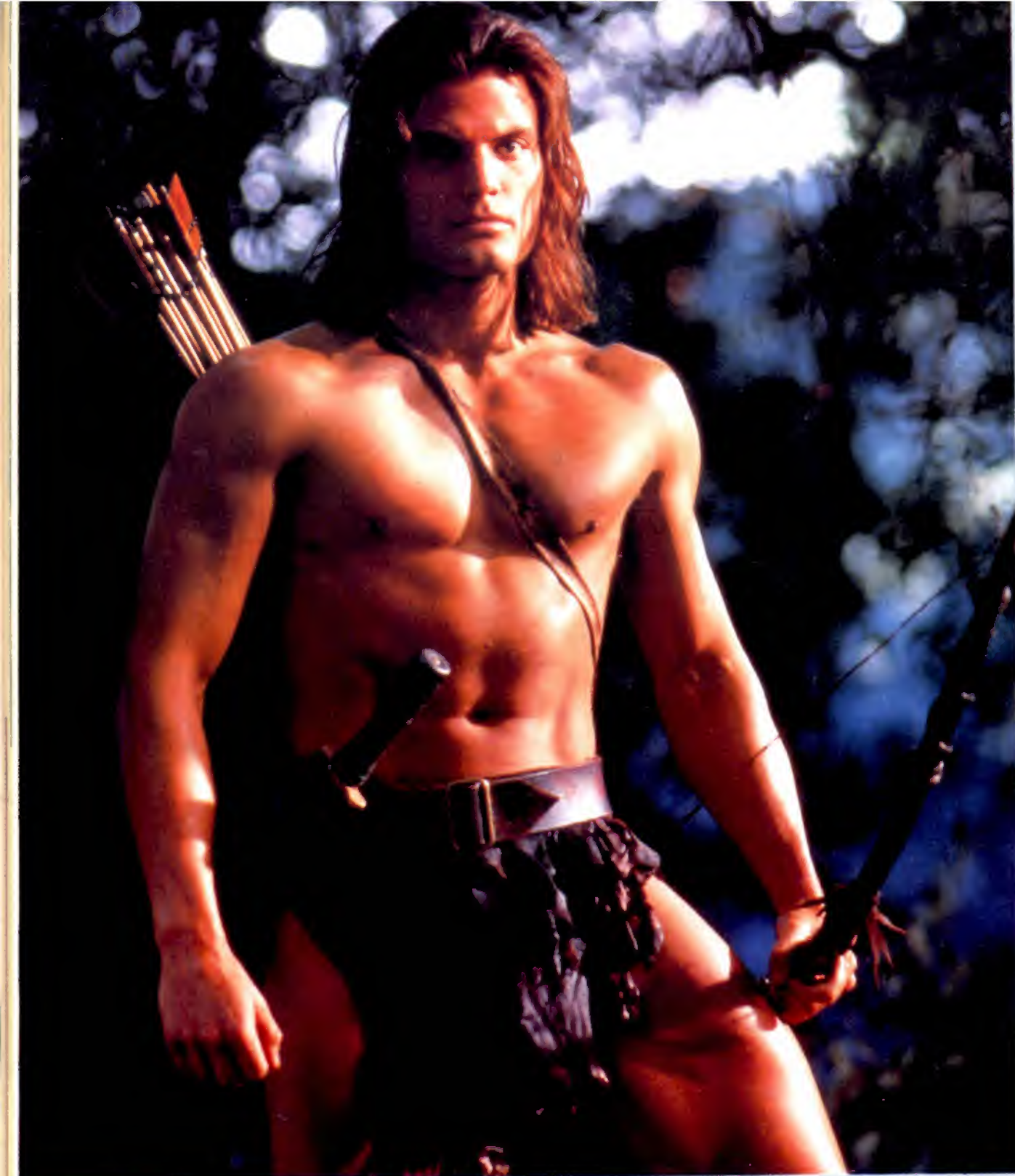
In the past, an Olympic medal or five was considered audition enough to play Tarzan; dramatic talent ranked low on the list of requirements for the role. The producers of *TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY* chose an unconventional route in casting their apeman—they hired a bona fide actor, Casper Van Dien. Though not a world-class athlete, Van Dien brought an Olympic-level work ethic to the role. Warner Bros opens the Village Roadshow Production, starring Van Dien in theatres nationwide in April.

"I didn't audition for the film," recalled Van Dien. "The executive producers saw an article on me stressing my work ethic in *Movieline* magazine, and they called Alan Marshall, the executive producer of *STARSHIP TROOPERS*. Greg Coote [executive producer of *TARZAN*] and Alan Marshall are good friends, and they had a three-hour conversation about me—how dedicated I am, working out every day, coming to the set early and prepared, and reading, writing and studying harder than anybody else. Greg hired me without even meeting me."

Before accepting the role, Van Dien engaged in his trademark in-depth research. "At first I was really curious, because I was vaguely familiar with the novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, from reading them when I was younger. I knew that Disney was doing *GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE*, and I didn't want to do a comedy. I read a couple of the books; then I got the script, which stole from the books. It was like Indiana Jones meets Tarzan, more of an intellectual Tarzan, the way Edgar Rice Burroughs originally wrote it, so it looked quite appealing."

Winning the role was another unusual coincidence for Van Dien, whose family possesses some distinctive traits—all first-born males are named Casper, and share a tradition of military service. Tarzan is becoming another family custom.

"Tarzan's my dad's favorite character," said Van Dien of his father, Casper Robert, known as Van. "My grandfather put these rings up from the porch to the trees, where he would hook up all these ropes and rings and things for my dad to swing around with his friends and act like Tarzan." Like his fa-



STARSHIP TROOPERS star Casper Van Dien won the role of Burroughs' immortal ape man without even auditioning. Van Dien co-stars with Jane March as Jane (below) in the Village Roadshow Production, shot in South Africa. The film opens in theaters nationwide in April from Warner Bros.



N. JUNGLE WARRIOR

apeman ever out-work Casper Van Dien?

ther, Van Dien lists swimming champion Johnny Weissmuller as his favorite of the 20 previous cinematic incarnations of the ape man.

Van Dien's son, Casper Robert Mitchum, four, dubbed "Bo," carries on the tradition, even to the point of wearing his own loincloth. "He runs around saying, 'I Tarzan,'" the actor beamed. Van Dien, who recently divorced wife Carrie Mitchum, has taken up residence in Tarzana, the San Fernando Valley city founded by author Edgar Rice Burroughs. Van Dien is designing a "Tarzan" room for Bo, "with little kid Tarzan books and stuff like that."

Though **TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY** purports to be a more sophisticated interpretation, some things remain the same. "I did a lot of vine-swinging," Van Dien said. "I was actually pretty good at it—I'm pretty strong for my height and size."

"I also did my own ape growl," said Van Dien of his contribution to the apeman's vocal legacy. "I studied Jane Goodall, and I wanted to have more of a bestial ape yell. I think they're going to combine it with the Weissmuller yell, as they've done for so many films."

As with the previous 40-odd Tarzan films, animal co-stars will play a large part in this tale. "I worked with elephants, lions, snakes, monkeys, ostriches, porcupines, and zebras; it's pretty incredible, the amount of animals on the shoot."

Thanks to more stringent guidelines for working with animals, no one was injured as they were on past Tarzan pictures. However, one rambunctious elephant tried to challenge Van Dien's authority. "I was charged by a baby elephant, who put his tusks into me and [threw] me back four feet, and then spread his ears, and went to charge me again." Van Dien dispelled the tense situation like a true apeman, by scrambling atop a large rock until trainers could calm the elephant.

"Then we just continued shooting. It's



Van Dien as Tarzan in **TARZAN & THE LOST CITY**, filmed before **STARSHIP TROOPERS**. To research his role, Van Dien reread all 24 Burroughs Tarzan novels.

like riding horses—if I fall off, I have to get right back on," he said. "That's the beauty of working with animals; they're very unpredictable. They didn't choose to be in the movie, so you never know exactly what they're gonna do, even if they're trained. These were circus elephants, but it was this one's first film job."

Other obstacles also loomed on the production. Though many of the cast and crew were hospitalized with tickbite fever, Tarzan prevailed, despite being unable to wear protective clothing or tick repellent.

Van Dien added 12 pounds of muscle to his frame while trimming another inch from his waist, which was already slimmed for **STARSHIP TROOPERS**. "Because I was physically more ripped up than my stunt men, I did all my own fights, which was really cool. I'd get up at 2:30 in the morning, and work out from three to five. My stunt man would be getting in from the bar at that time," he joked. "My waist was 29 inches, and the next closest stuntman to me had a 32 inch waist. In a loincloth, you can't hide love handles—although some Tarzans in the past have tried to," he concluded with a laugh, alluding to the aging Weissmuller's ever-expanding breech clout.

"My feet and legs got ripped up, I did-

n't wear any booties or anything like that—I was Tarzan! I ran around in a loincloth and that's it; nothing else," he boasts, tongue firmly in cheek.

Questioned about his previous turn in a loincloth, **BEASTMASTER 3**, Van Dien responded, "Parallels? No," then joked, "I got to wear boots in **BEASTMASTER**. I also had the opportunity to work with a great director, Gabrielle Beaumont, who directed a lot of **STAR TREK** episodes. It was fun."

Though rumors of a difficult shoot drifted back from the **Dark Continent**, Van Dien had nothing but respect for his boss. "Carl Schenkel is a very solid director who fights for his work. He might piss people off, but at least he knows what he wants, so I can respect that."

The actor also squelched rumors that he didn't get along with costar Jane March, in the role of Tarzan's ladylove, Jane. "It's unfair that people would make assumptions on stuff like that. I worked out really hard, getting up in the morning when most everyone else was in bed. I guess people might think I didn't like her, because I didn't hang out with her. She's a married woman, and I was married at the time, and all I did was concentrate on working out and studying. I don't regret it—we got along fine on the set."

The actor, who eventually reread all 24 Tarzan novels to research his role, can be seen later this year in the vampire movie **REVENANT**, and **ON THE BORDER**, a "who's screwing who" tale of five gangs of bankrobbers who descend on El Paso.

"I'd like to work with Jim Cameron," he responds, when queried about future ambitions. "Like every other actor in the age group, I would love to be Spiderman and Peter Parker—that'd be cool." He then segues into a laundry list of other directors and actors he wants to work with, including just about every respected name in Hollywood. "And I'd love to do another Tarzan film and be truer to Mr. Burroughs," he concluded. □

TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY

Producer Stan Canter finishes his long journey to follow-up GREYSTOKE.

By Scott Tracy Griffin

Tarzan of the Apes once again stalks the big screen after a 14-year absence in Warner Brothers' new release, *TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY*. It was a long, hard-fought battle back to moviedom for the apeman, who enjoyed delirious popularity for much of the twentieth century before practically disappearing from public radar for more than a decade.

The apeman's storied film history includes big-budget, A-list productions like *GREYSTOKE: THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, LORD OF THE APES* (1984), and Johnny Weissmuller's Tarzan debut, *TARZAN OF THE APE MAN* (1932), as well as puerile fare such as the 1981 John and Bo Derek remake of the Weissmuller original. Most Tarzan films, especially those produced by Sol Lesser and starring Johnny Weissmuller or Lex Barker, aimed for the juvenile market.

LOST CITY strives to take itself seriously, while still appealing to children. The film, which was seven years in the making, was shepherded by Stan Canter, the producer responsible for *GREYSTOKE*. Despite the critical and commercial success of *GREYSTOKE*, a rare sophisticated take on author Edgar Rice Burroughs' creation, plans for a sequel sputtered.

Warner Brothers declined to pick up an option for the sequel, and Burroughs' heirs pulled the Tarzan license off the market briefly, negotiating for a big-budget Broadway musical about the apeman. When the play did-



Casper Van Dien in *TARZAN & THE LOST CITY*, the spiritual heir to *GREYSTOKE*, the lavish Burroughs adaptation also produced by Stan Canter.

n't materialize, Canter was allowed to re-option the rights to begin peddling his own *GREYSTOKE* sequel.

"For whatever reason, it was very difficult to get a Tarzan film made," comments Canter. "I never can figure these things out. (*GREYSTOKE*) was a miracle in that Warner Brothers' (studio head) John Kelly wanted to make it, because a lot of people felt Tarzan was obsolete, and just didn't work in today's market."

Canter, however, believed. He continued to renew his option with the Burroughs estate, until finally contracting with 20th Century Fox in 1994. The Australian company Village Roadshow also partnered with the studio. The screenplay, originally penned by British scribe J. Anderson Black, was rewritten by Bayard Johnson, an up-and-coming writer whose credits include *DAMNED RIVER*

and *THE SECOND JUNGLE BOOK*. Fox hired George P. Cosmatos (*SHADOW CONSPIRACY*) to helm, and commissioned another rewrite from mainstream scripters.

"Fox hired a couple of writers who'd had recent hits," explains Johnson, "but I didn't feel they really got the Tarzan character and his world. I'd been a longtime fan, reading the books since I was in the fourth grade."

According to an insider, one of the writers Cosmatos hired was *SPEED* scribe Graham Yost, flush with his recent success, who reportedly earned six figures for one week's work on the script.

Cosmatos also wooed A-list scribe Chuck Pogue (*DRAGONHEART, KULL*), a longtime Burroughs fan who, nevertheless, declined scripting chores, citing the brevity of the turnaround time.

"Fox, to be honest, could never figure out what film they wanted to make," remarked Canter. "So, in late summer 1996, we, in essence, took the film away. Then Village Roadshow got lukewarm on it. I sat down with Bayard Johnson and we came up with a completely new script. It wasn't a sequel, but it was a very intelligent Tarzan film with an historically accurate background."

"Village Roadshow read it, loved it, and came back in," he continues. "I raised money in Europe. (*NEVERENDING STORY* producer) Dieter Geissler out of Germany, Village Roadshow, and I all put up a certain amount, and we prepared to shoot in South Africa." Casper Van Dien (*STARSHIP TROOPERS*) was cast as Tarzan (see sidebar), with Jane March (*THE LOVER, COLOR OF NIGHT*) portraying the apeman's true love, Jane.

The original story, lifting elements of the novels, involves the freshly civilized Tarzan's return to his jungle homeland after experiencing a mystic vision of impending doom. A group of mercenaries, led by Nigel Ravens (Steve Waddington) has invaded the jungle in search of the lost city of Opar's treasure. They proceed to capture animals, shoot apes, oppress the natives, and wreak all sorts of nasty, standard-issue jungle movie havoc before Tarzan mops them up in his usual fashion—albeit with the politically-correct assistance of native warriors Mugambi (Winston Ntshona) and Kaya (Rapulana Seiphemo).

As with the late *TARZAN: THE EPIC ADVENTURES*



In South Africa, Van Dien as Tarzan with Jane March as Jane.

television series, the American icon was farmed out to an overseas creative team at the foreign financiers' behest. German director Carl Schenkel (KNIGHT MOVES, THE MIGHTY QUINN) was hired, with Geissler's Düsseldorf-based effects house, CineMagic, providing visual effects. Schenkel's approach was passionate, to say the least.

"I think that Carl Schenkel is one of these mad genius characters, like many directors," says Johnson. "You don't get to be a movie director unless you're so focused that you don't care about a lot of the niceties that the typical person cares about. Schenkel has tremendous focus and obsession, and that's difficult for many people to deal with."

"When I saw the footage, I felt he did a really good job," continues the scribe. "You came to appreciate the abilities of this guy. I've never seen an African village captured the way that he does...Schenkel shot some great jungle scenes, great se-

quences. In the pieces I've seen, "When you take a character like Tarzan, there are certain conventions that you accept—that a man can be virtually as strong as an ape, through his upbringing; that he could run through the trees faster than you can run along the ground. I'm not sure exactly how that could happen, but you accept that," says Johnson, who believes that Tarzan should remain firmly grounded in reality. "If you allow it to become cartoonish or any kind of a caricature, it starts looking like some George of the Jungle idiocy. I'm not interested in a Tarzan like that. I'm interested in [believing] that this could happen in the real world."

he's made Tarzan look like the character that I was after, the character I knew from the books, that I grew up loving, so I compliment him on that, whatever the trials and tribulations of the shoot."

"You always hear stories about who's fighting with who, that's typical on a movie. The thing you have to look at, in the

“For whatever reason, it was very difficult to get a Tarzan film made,” commented Canter. “A lot of people felt Tarzan was obsolete...”

final analysis, is what's on the screen, and what Schenkel put on the screen was powerful, and he should be commended for it. I'm eager to see how the final version looks, because, if the special effects come out believable, I think it's going to be quite a riveting film."

While press materials compare the film to the Indiana Jones trilogy, Johnson bristles at the analogy. "There was no intention to be influenced by Indiana Jones, because I thought that series was very childish and cartoonish. I don't mean that as a criticism, it's just a characteristic of those movies...they break from reality and enter into movie reality, which can be very self-conscious and self-referential to the movie world, which to me is boring...I don't want to see an imitation of a movie—I want to see an imitation of life that makes me forget it's an imitation.

Principal photography, completed entirely in South Africa, proved no easier than the convoluted preproduction. The film was shot in jungles and 6,000 foot mountainous terrain, characterized by Canter as "the most difficult locations I've ever been on." Transporting cast, crew, gear, and supplies into the undeveloped areas was a logistical nightmare, further complicated by an outbreak of tick fever, which hospitalized several of the crew members.

Another challenge lay in creating a compelling vision for half the cost of GREYSTOKE's \$31 million budget. Rick Baker, who contributed the Oscar-nominated ape effects on GREYSTOKE, proved too expensive for the production, which was only able to afford two trained ape actors for the less-than-state-of-the-art ape suits. "As fate would have it, the pair we hired got hurt, so we ended up picking up two stunt people from South Africa who had never done ape work be-

fore," commented Canter, who conceded that GREYSTOKE was a tough act to follow.

Like Johnson, Canter gives Lost City high marks for the direction, cinematography, and overall look, which strove to capture the period (1912) authentically. Production design by Herbert Pinter included a treehouse, two native villages, 30 stone warriors and the colossal staircase to the Sacred Idol of Opar.

"The only disappointing thing to me was that Bayard and I started out to make an intelligent, faithful Tarzan," laments Canter, "and in post[production], Village Roadshow decided to change a lot of it so it would appeal, in quotes, to the 'under fifteen males who made GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE a huge hit.' It's a commercial decision, and I didn't have the right to argue it, but it wasn't essentially the film Bayard and I set out to make, so hopefully, it will work." □

Van Dien as Lord Greystoke, a serious Burroughs adaptation marketed for teenage boys.



WATCHERS

The Dean-Koontz-based franchise returns

By Chuck Wagner

In WATCHERS IV—the third sequel based on the Dean Koontz novel, *Watchers*—a creature called The Outsider does more than watch. A genetically engineered killing machine, The Outsider is on a quest for revenge against detective Travis Murphy (Mark Hamill). Murphy's allies are a female genetic scientist named Grace Hudson, a partner (played by Gary Collins), and a genetically altered golden retriever named Einstein. The film's director, John Buechler, is noted for his effects work on films like TROLL and FRIDAY THE 13TH, PART 7. Sources at Roger Corman's Concorde/New Horizon company say he made *The Outsider's* costume less than two weeks before filming. The movie hits the direct-to-video shelves May 19th.

In addition to familiar faces Hamill and Collins, singing legend Lou Rawls portrays a coroner who has a lot of bodies to study. "I guess they figure Lou Rawls is now doing the acting thing," Rawls said, with a deep chuckle. "I've been getting calls like crazy. It's fun. The only problem is, it's the hurry up and wait. It's like, they call and you don't need to be there until four. So I figure that means around seven, seven-thirty they'll be ready for me. My first day on this movie, my call was for like nine forty-five...I guess around three that afternoon, I did something!"

"It's varied. I've done a lot of TV stuff. And some feature film things, too. In this film, I'm Dr. Grimes, the coroner. I'm the one who investigates the bodies and all that stuff. In this film, the dog and *The Outsider* have a genetic connection. The dog's a genius."

Rawls discussed his musical career. But shouldn't he be going over the lines for the scene? Just how many lines did he have that night? "Nothing. Zippo. No lines," he said. "Just standing there looking at this dead body.

"They allowed me to become co-producer and added a back-end directing deal," said Mark Hamill about his role. "I thought it was a good idea to get my feet wet."



Mark Hamill stars with Gary Collins. Hamill plays a detective trailing the Outsider, a genetically engineered killing machine. The sequel hits shelves in May.

Tonight, I just raise the sheet." He pantomimed this, peering down at where the mangled remains would be in the scene he was to film. "Uh-uh," he said, shaking his head as he would after viewing the corpse. Then he smiled. "That's about it for tonight!"

He laughed. Rawls' rumble was warm and sincere. Recently he had played a role as a manager in the HBO film on promoter Don King, ONLY IN AMERICA. Instead of being a coroner in the film, Rawls' character winds up murdered! Acting is indeed interesting.

"I like this work," Rawls said, "because I get to meet a lot of people like Gary Collins and Mark Hamill and the crews. It's fulfilling, doing something different from what I normally do.

"The first acting I did was years ago, back in the '60s. I played a cowboy on THE BIG VALLEY. Barbara Stanwyck was a la-

dy. Very sweet. She always told me, 'Lou, you'll always know if everything's right if you feel the light all over your face. If you don't feel the light all over your face, it's wrong. Unless, it's in a specific shot, they're doing. Otherwise, if you don't feel the fullness of the light on your face, then the shot's wrong for you.'"

Elsewhere on the lot was Gary Collins. His ladies' talk show days behind him, he was doomed to die that night at the hands of *The Outsider*.

"I'm a homicide detective," Collins explained. "Mark Hamill and I are partners. It's my misfortune to get assigned to this thing and I get destroyed this evening by this creature."

The creature, under the costume, was a pleasant fellow and local golf pro, known to Collins and several others on the set. "Yeah, he's normally such a nice guy," Collins said. "I see him up at the golf club all the time. He rips my arm off. And it flies through the room, and it's got a pistol in it and it bumps up against the wall and falls down

on the floor. And then he takes his big hand and literally tears the front of my face off. I think by then I'm pretty well out of it."

A stunt man who bore some resemblance to Collins bounced on a small trampoline near the set as Collins spoke. "It's one shot," Collins continued, waving at his double, "that's all we get. This guy puts a big claw on my face and rakes me across the face. The glove is quite soft, but it just looks awful. At the end of each one of the fingers are tubes that are full of make-believe blood. As soon as they start pumping it through there...well, as you can see by my wardrobe [a cheap suit] they didn't spend a lot of money on it. They can lose it."

For Mark Hamill, there were several reasons to do WATCHERS IV. "Once again," he explained, "I was involved through *The Black Pearl* [the Dark Horse comic created by Hamill which completed a limited run some

IV

on home video.

months ago, and for which Hamill harbors hopes of a live-action movie]. I pitched it at Concorde, but they had WATCHERS IV for me. I told them that I was more interested in keeping focused on getting BLACK PEARL made, but they very graciously allowed me to become co-producer of WATCHERS IV and added a back-end directing deal. Besides, WATCHERS IV is based on a Dean Koontz novel. So I had no problem with doing it. I also thought it was a good idea to get my feet wet behind the scenes without having to jump into the deep end of the pool, so to speak, by doing BLACK PEARL right off the bat."

So Luke Skywalker will move behind the camera? "Next week I'll be looking at material with Roger Corman. If I'm not going to do BLACK PEARL, he'd rather have me pick something that he already owns. I think the parameters of what's on the table from Concorde will dictate the kind of project that I want to do."

So, as so many times before, Roger Corman's Concorde/New Horizon company will foster a new director. "I'd like to work with children, if I could," he said. "Obviously we don't have the kind of money to get name actors."

But if Hamill doesn't want to make BLACK PEARL his life's work, how does he feel about the new STAR WARS films, which may as indelibly stamp a new round of actors as the original films stamped him? "It sounds incredible," he said. "These will be state of the art fantasy films with a lifetime of know-how behind them. I hope people don't get in the comparison game, because it's really going to be apples and oranges. It's a given that they'll be vastly superior technically. I remember when I asked George, 'Why are we starting in the middle?' and he said 'Well, the first three aren't as commercial.' I think that sounds exciting. With his technical ability, the idea of doing less overtly-commercial material is really tantalizing. I can't wait."

But for now, Hamill has a hairy beast to hunt. □



The Outsider in the previous sequel WATCHERS III. Director John Carl Buechler also supervised the monsters in the new installment, dispatching Kane Hodder (below) and abducting Lisa Wilcox (Inset).



BRAM STOKER'S

The Mummy

Jeffrey Obrow builds an "old fashioned" horror film from Jewel of the 7 Stars.

By John Thonen

For most writers, the actual genesis of a particular story or script is often a mystery. For Jeffrey Obrow, writer/director of the upcoming BRAM STOKER'S LEGEND OF THE MUMMY, the muse for his project's birth is crystal clear. It was the moment he saw his friend Matthew Mungle win the 1992 Academy Award for his makeup work on BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA.

Mungle and Obrow had begun their careers together with Obrow's debut film, 1982's THE DORM THAT DRIPPED BLOOD and later collaborated on Obrow's THE POWER ('83) and THE KINDRED ('87). Seeing his friend receiving the award was gratifying for Obrow, but it also created a bit of nostalgia for those days struggling in the world of independent filmmaking. In addition, he found himself wondering what great horror novels, other than DRACULA, were waiting to be brought to a new audience via film.

"The next day I went to the library and started researching," recalled Obrow. From the outset, the writer/director was looking for something that would provide the basis for what he called "a good old-fashioned haunted house tale," but one that also featured such classic screen monsters as vampires, werewolves or mummies. "I was very interested in something that used those traditions, but which could also be used within a '90s sensibility," explained Obrow. The most important element to the filmmaker was that it have "the potential to be terrifying." Eventually his search led him to a Bram Stoker novel, *The Jewel of the 7 Stars*. Shortly afterwards Obrow began a film adaptation.

Obrow had been away from the often harsh world of independent film since the making of Dean R. Koontz's SERVANTS



Director Jeffrey Obrow and his star, makeup design by Chad Washam and Chris Fording.

OF TWILIGHT ('91) He had spent the interim doing what he referred to as "hard-core producing," making music videos for the likes of Chicago, Rush and Spinal Tap. While Obrow had never actively pursued music video work, he had soon done 23 in a row. "It's all-consuming," he said. "By the time you get home it's tough to make yourself head for the typewriter. It was exciting, great for my producing skills, but I love directing and I've really come to enjoy writing. I needed to get back to those."

Obrow was aware that there had been

two previous film versions of Stoker's novel, neither particularly well respected. "I made a half-hearted effort to see the Hammer one [BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB '71] but it's not available on video. Then I decided I was better off not to risk the influence, so I didn't even try to see the one with Charlton Heston [1980's THE AWAKENING].

While updated to present-day San Francisco instead of turn-of-the-century England, Obrow tried to stay close to the novel wherever possible. "I just didn't feel right about using his name in the title if I didn't have some integrity to his story," he explained. In order to make the story more palatable to a '90s audience Obrow initially worked with John Penney (his KINDRED co-writer) on a story adaptation. "There weren't a lot of scary scenes in the book, so what we did was take where we felt he [Stoker] was going, and make a conscious effort to go somewhere in the same direction, but terrifying. I'd like to think that if Stoker could see it he'd say, 'Yes, that makes sense,'" explained the director.

In the previous versions of Stoker's story, Hammer had used the venerable "mummy" concept in the title and Heston's film had featured it predominately in its advertising. But the classic re-animated corpse of Hollywood lore was never actually a presence in either film. Obrow took a different approach. "The mummy does get up and move in our film," he said. "That wasn't in the book. It was Tera's invisible spirit in an astral form. In our script you don't know for a while, but eventually we do see the mummy in action. Our mummy is much more of a threat, and a lot scarier."

Penney was originally to write the screenplay but had to leave prematurely. Obrow finished the script himself, and in '94 began shopping his script around Holly-



Amy Locane as Margaret Trelawny gazes on the peaceful form of Egyptian Queen Tera, restored to life once again in this version of Stoker's oft-filmed tale.

wood. But there were no takers. Instead of giving up, he put his "hard core producing" skills into high gear, called in some favors, and assembled a 10-minute promotional film for his prospective movie. Effects artists Mungle and Mike McCracken, who had created the main monster in *THE KINDRED*, recommended a couple of their top protégés for the short film's effects. Obrow gathered most of the rest of the crew from the graduate level Independent Features course he taught at the USC film school.

"I've done this with every film I've made," Obrow said. "I heard at a seminar once that in every organization there's 10 people who can say 'no' to your project, but only one who can say 'yes.' Problem is, to get it in front of that person, there are layers of 'readers' and development people because that 'one guy' doesn't have the time to read every script. But, you've got a pretty good chance that he will take the time to pop a 10-minute video into his VCR. If you've done the job right, it will sell your project, and sell you, because he doesn't just read it, now he can see what you're capable of."

Obrow then worked with writer Lars Hauglie on another story adaptation that would make the characters more involving and "turn the scares up a couple of notches," said Obrow. "Lars helped take the John Corbeck character, who is secondary in the book, and bring him to the forefront." True to his concept of expanding on Stoker's own concepts, Obrow took Corbeck, a loyal assistant to Trelawny, whom the novel only briefly casts doubt upon, and gradually revealed him as an obsessed and potentially dangerous man. "I don't really look at him as a villain," said Obrow. "He doesn't come

to the house planning to do evil things. But he is seduced, in part by the situation and the potential for power, and in part by the presence of Queen Tera."

Harel Goldstein and Bill Barnet at Goldbar Entertainment had exactly the reaction Obrow was hoping for. For Barnet the script's greatest strength was that "it's not just pure horror. There's a mystery aspect and interesting characters. I thought it was good enough to attract a strong cast and turn out to be a really good little film." Barnet and Goldstein worked closely with Obrow in a script polish prior to actual production. "What we wanted was to be sure that the film would have the style and credibility to appeal to the widest possible audience, not just the hard-core horror fan."

To finance the film, the producing duo pre-sold several major foreign markets and

British character actor Aubrey Morris as Dr. Winchester, cutting open Tera's mummified form.



brought in video distributors Unapix (A-PIX Home Video) as partners. In addition to raising the crucial money to produce the film, Goldstein and Barnett were able to assemble a cast of familiar faces including Amy Locane (*MELROSE PLACE*) Eric Lutz (*CAROLINE IN THE CITY*) Richard Karn (*HOME IMPROVEMENT*) and veteran actor Lloyd Bochner. They also got an acting asset that Obrow hadn't expected: an Academy Award winning star. "It was just perfect when they told me they thought they could get Lou Gossett," recalled Obrow. "There's a great character arc to the role of John Corbeck. He starts as a friend, then slowly turns until we realize he is absolutely crazed. I could see Lou in the part the moment they mentioned him."

Obrow has now worked with three Academy Award winners, having worked with Rod Steiger and Kim Hunter on *THE KINDRED*, and now Gossett. But he is quick to point out that "There is no downside to working with people of this caliber. With a less experienced actor, the director has to work with them to find the character. An actor like Lou has it down before he walks on the set." Gossett was only on set for a portion of *MUMMY*'s rapid-fire shoot, but he quickly impressed Obrow. "His reaction shots are more interesting than most actors are during their big dialogue scenes," he recalled. "There are times when I would cease to be a director and become like an audience member, just watching and enjoying that level of craftsmanship."

In the final version of the script, Obrow had also made some changes to the male lead, Robert Wyatt. "In the book, he's kind of a stiff, which was pretty typical of that era. We wanted



Louis Gossett Jr. as John Corbeck, seduced by the prospect of bringing Queen Tera back to life. Writer/director Jeffrey Obrow and writer Lars Hauglie expanded the character from Stoker's original story.

someone a little more hip, someone you would like and be more involved with." Eric Lutz took the part and Obrow describes him as "remarkable. He's charismatic, funny, likable—a perfect leading man." Obrow and Hauglie had also brought in an aspect totally lacking in Stoker: humor. "It's an old idea really. You take your audience to a peak of tension, then relieve that with humor. Then, you can build again," explained the director. To do this the duo developed a character not in the book, Robert's best friend, Bryce Renard, played by HOME IMPROVEMENT co-star Richard Karn. "We were looking for some comic relief, a fun character, someone quirky, but who still fits in," said Obrow. "That describes Richard perfectly."

While filmed in less than 30 days, LEGEND OF THE MUMMY's production was remarkably smooth. A credit, said Obrow, to the professionalism of all concerned. A large share of his compliments go to Chad Washam and Chris Fording, the Mungle and McCracken protégés from the promotional short, who also handled the film's near omnipresent effects sequences. "They were on the set almost every day," said Obrow. It's unusual for your effects crew to be around that much, but we had so much going on. There was some kind of effect in almost every location. They did a hell of a job." Unlike many directors, who have little good to say about their producers, Obrow has nothing but praise for Goldstein and Barnett. "This is the first film I've done where I wasn't at least a co-producer, but Bill and Harel were so strong as producers, I didn't have to worry about that. I could concentrate on directing. Which was great."

"We are very hands-on," ex-

plained Barnett. "One of us was on the set almost every moment of the production. If there's a problem we get involved immediately so the director doesn't have to. Harel is simply one of the best physical producers in the business. If you're running short of time one day and have four shots to make, but only time for two, he's the guy that will come up with the way to do it. I don't want to be blowing our own horn, but I can honestly say that without us, the films we make just couldn't be made."

The only major glitch in the film's production was when Gossett had to miss a few days due to a dental problem. "That was a nightmare for a while," told Barnett. "We have about six characters who are in almost every scene together and when Lou missed those two or three days it took a lot of juggling with everyone's schedules. Luckily, Lou's a great guy and he was very willing to do anything he could to help make it work."

The film's hectic production pace left little time for improvising, but Obrow did have to make one major adjustment midway through the shoot. "As we got further into the film we got a sense that the opening I had

Rachel Naples as Queen Tera in a flashback to ancient Egypt, performing the ritual that will restore her to life 3000 years later.



“There weren't a lot of scary scenes in the book...Our mummy is much more of a threat, and a lot scarier.”

—Director Jeffrey Obrow—

written, while very mysterious, was simply not terrifying enough. The producers and I stayed late one day and came up with something that really grabs you." Barnett added that "We wanted to kind of wake the audience up right at the start." The film now begins with Gossett's character as a young boy in Egypt. "The great thing about it," said Barnett, "is that it also benefits the film in that it makes a full circle in terms of that character's story." They quickly cast a couple of people for the parts, talked to Washam and Fording about the effects for it, and shot it in a quick five hours. "I'm very satisfied with it," said Obrow.

Last August Obrow was finishing the sound and music mix and waiting for the completion of a CGI sequence. "It's a very scary scene where Sgt. Daw [Mark Lindsay Chapman of TV's old SWAMP THING series] is sinking in a sand pit beneath the house. There are some strange little creatures that sense him and come from their hiding places. We could have done it with traditional effects, but we felt CGI would do a more effective job," he explained. Eric Vallente and Ray Pettet handled the digital work. "It's great in that area now because you don't need an ILM, or some other big company, to get good work."

Obrow is already at work on the script for, THEY ARE AMONG US, which he describes only as "an alien film." While he hoped LEGEND OF THE MUMMY would garner a theatrical release he had a positive attitude should it, like SERVANTS OF

TWILIGHT before it, debut on cable or video. "SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT ended up a 'Showtime Original Presentation' and millions more people saw it than if it had been released theatrically. There's gratification to seeing your film play to an audience in a theater, but ultimately I think you want to have the largest number of people possible experience it. If LEGEND OF THE MUMMY goes theatrical, great. If not, I'm happier with cable and video because I know it's reaching the largest audience and I think that is what storytelling is all about." □

BRAM STOKER

200 year-old author is Hollywood's hot new item.

By John Thonen

While neither especially successful nor prolific in his lifetime, Bram Stoker has achieved an immortality equal to any of his late 1800s contemporaries. That fame is largely the result of his classic horror novel *Dracula*, and perhaps most of all, its numerous film adaptations. Francis Ford Coppola's *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* even elevated the Irish author to the '90s mantle of "Brand Name Horror," alongside Stephen King and Clive Barker. Not bad for a writer dead almost a century.

Stoker-derived films have been a cinematic presence for nearly the span of film history itself, beginning in 1921 with the unauthorized *Dracula* adaptation, *NOSFERATU*. David Skal's authoritative *Hollywood Gothic*, a book on the gestation of the 1931 *DRACULA*, lists 11 direct film or TV adaptations of Stoker's classic. Coppola's recent offering makes it an even dozen.

Most of the *Dracula* film adaptations were well-covered when *CFQ* celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Irish author's most famous work (29:4/5). However, while *Dracula* certainly claims the lion's share of the Stoker-derived filmography, there is a growing body of films based on some of his other works. The most noticeable—if not especially notable—of these come from his 1903 novel *Jewel of 7 Stars*. At least three film versions have been produced to date, with yet another three looming on the cinematic horizon.

Hammer's *BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB* ('72) suffered a troubled production. The project almost seemed to have befallen the curse of the novel's evil Queen Tera, with director Seth Holt (*THE NAN-*



Valerie Leon as Queen Tera in Hammer's 1971 *BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB*, which added a sexy slant to Stoker's "Jewel of the Seven Stars."

NY, SCREAM OF FEAR) dying three weeks into filming. Producer Michael Carreras, who had to take the directing helm on a mere day's notice, did a remarkably seamless job in completing Holt's work. While at times slow and confusing—neither surprising in light of Holt's death—the film is atmospheric, moody and mysterious. These are qualities unusual for Hammer at a time when they were relying more on explicit sex and violence. While not without its merits, the story stands or falls on the strength of its female lead, and Valerie Leon was all too typical of the era's Hammer starlet—pneumatically impressive, but emotionally vapid.

1980's *THE AWAKENING* took its inspiration more from *THE OMEN*'s success than from Stoker. Far too much of the film is devoted to gory set-pieces and too little to Stoker's mood and tone. While Stoker's book is wonderfully claustrophobic, *THE AWAKENING* often seems more travelogue than horror film. If the film is remem-

bered at all, it will be as star Charlton Heston's only horror film. Ironically, Heston's son Fraser (*NEEDFUL THINGS*) will be directing one of the upcoming versions. While no production date is set, it does appear that the film will at least be the first to use Stoker's title. In early '96, director Jeffrey Obrow (*THE KINDRED*) completed production on *BRAM STOKER'S THE MUMMY* (see page 40). Another adaptation, *THE MUMMY*, is coming from Michael Almareyda, who also directed *NADJA*.

Easily the most unusual Stoker adaptation comes from the author's final major work of fiction, *LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM*. It is unusual partially because the novel was not typical Stoker, but also because *nothing* director Ken Russell does is a typical film. The possibility that Stoker wrote it in near-dementia caused by the final stages of syphilis could at least explain its disori-

ented narrative. Though few literary historians give much credence to this theory, it was all the reason Russell needed to create his slightly mad and hallucinatory 1988 film. It's an enjoyably campy romp, and one can only wonder what might have come of his aborted *DRACULA* project.

And there is certainly worse; *BRAM STOKER'S BURIAL OF THE RATS* is not just the worst Stoker adaptation, but also one of the worst films to come from Roger Corman's New Horizon video—an achievement of sorts in itself. Former nudie photographer Dan Golden did some interesting things as director of the erotic thriller *NAKED OBSESSION*, but his attempt to use scantily clad "rat-women,"

to enliven Stoker's stiff tale is too stupid to even be titillating. Actual Russian locales are wasted, as is the beauty of stars Adrienne Barbeau and Maria Ford.

Stoker's new-found value as a brand name is apparent in the soon-to-be-released



Bram Stoker

BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER (see page 44). But finding Stoker tales that haven't been mined cinematically is getting trickier. For *SHADOWBUILDER*, screenwriter Michael Stokes delved into the rare *Under the Sunset*. The book is actually a collection of fables written by Stoker, supposedly aimed at children. But Stoker himself had no children and the stories are reportedly much too dark for their intended audience. While one hopes that Dixon is successful in bringing the author's dark viewpoint to the screen, it is certain that these will not be the last films to derive from the Stoker literary pantheon. □

BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER

Ash Shah produces a tale of soul-consuming evil lurking in the darkness.

By John Thonen

BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER, from Canadian writer Michael Stokes, is based on a little-known short story from Stoker's now rare collection of dark children's fables, *Under the Sunset*. Stoker's story dealt with a character that can control and manipulate shadows. To expand the story and its potential as a horror film, Stokes created a creature composed of shadows, possessed of a power to control and shape them to its needs. Every time the being consumes someone it gets stronger, by absorbing that person's soul and knowledge.

Its ultimate goal is the pure soul of 12-year-old Chris Hatcher, which it will acquire at the height of an approaching solar eclipse. Ash Shah's Imperial Entertainment produced the direct-to-video project in association with effects supplier Hammerhead Productions.

The writer described his creation as "like having something radioactive around—you can't see it, you can't smell it, but it poisons you. It's psychic poisoning. The longer he is there and the more powerful he gets, the more the town literally begins to go to hell. People begin to act on darker emotions. Night falls and the darkness really holds sway." As the film's promo trailer for the 1997 AFM (the major film market for independent productions) puts it: "And then God said, let there be light. And there was light. And the first shadow was born. Be afraid of the dark."

Shortly before the 1996 AFM, Ash Shah decided a brief "teaser" for the film might pick up foreign pre-sales. Hammerhead Productions was more than willing to put one together. "We were eager to sink our



Under the influence of the Shadowbuilder, Mr. Butterman (Paul Soles) goes berserk and chops his wife's head off, the film's first shock.

teeth into the project," recalled Hammerhead partner Jamie Dixon, "so we wrote it, shot for a day and then Thad [Beier] and I did around 15 effects for it. All within about 10 days. It ran about 90 seconds and only cost \$25,000, but in the intensity of the moment we came up with some pretty cool stuff."

Indeed they must have, for Shah's last minute hunch paid off with pre-sales that fully funded the production and even pushed it into profit. Imperial decided to use Canadian-based Applecreek Communications to actually produce the film, under the auspices of producer Andy Emilio, while Imperial would concentrate on further sales and marketing.

"Jamie's extensive background in visual effects made him the perfect choice to direct," said Dan Chuba, Hammerhead's chief. "The field of visual effects provides a broad view of the filmmaking process from script development on through to post production. Jamie's been exposed to it all. Combine that with his ability to deliver over 200 effects shots, and the decision was sealed."

Dixon added, "I've directed Robin Williams, Arnold Schwarzenegger and many other in effects-oriented sequences that are much more foreign to them than the traditional 'what's my motivation' thing."

While producer Emilio scouted for a Canadian location to double for the script's up-state New York setting, Dixon began casting. "Obviously we didn't have the resources for a cast of big name actors, and since much of the film was financed by foreign sales, we had to come up with a lead who would have appeal for that market as well." Frequent movie tough-guy Michael Rooker (HENRY, PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER) was the number-

one choice to play Shadowbuilder's nemesis, heavily-armed, renegade priest Jacob Vassey. The actor's on-screen intensity—combined with his recognizability outside the U.S., from foreign blockbusters like CLIFFHANGER—easily landed him the role.

The film's other crucial role was that of the Shadowbuilder himself. Andrew Jackson—a relatively unknown but highly experienced actor—cinched the role with a daring audition. Blessed with a highly trained voice, from years with Canada's Stratford Festival, Jackson donned a stage mask and burst into the room in a wildly demonic improvisation. Dixon was so impressed that he hired him on the spot. Jackson's remarkable vocal range allowed him to create four distinct voices for his role. "I've allowed the character to start off awkward, almost embryonic," the actor explained. "As he evolves and takes on the personalities of each character he consumes, he becomes more sophisticated. By the end he is very powerful vocally and physically. Some people may think that the voice has been altered mechanically, but it hasn't—



The sheriff's deputy (Gordon M. Woolvet) has the light and life-force sucked from his body as the dark force takes on physical form, adapting Stoker's little-known children's story "Under the Sunset."

“The idea of a ‘monster’ made of shadows was very appealing...I’d like to think the film will make people look twice into the dark corners.”

—Director Jamie Dixon—

the difference between his past experience as a visual artist, and that of a beleaguered film director. “With digital visual effects it is within my power to make it better. To make it ‘perfect.’ As a director, you don’t have that. The experience is exhilarating, and I can’t wait to do it again, but that stage of perfection doesn’t exist.”

When SHADOWBUILDER’s production wrapped, Dixon completed a rough cut of the film before leaving Toronto. But an entirely new challenge was awaiting him back in California. Executive producers Ash Shah and Dan Chuba had watched Dixon’s cut of the film and, while pleased with it overall, they were quite unhappy with the realization of the title creature. “There was a lot of dissatisfaction with the mask,” said Chuba. “It wasn’t that it was bad, but it was what it was: another guy in a mask. Something we knew audiences had seen too many times before.” Dixon added, “I want to be very clear that Françoise [Dugénais] did a great job on the mask. He designed it, spent four hours a day applying it. It was quite striking. But it was a low budget film and there was no time or money for test footage on the mask and it had limitations that I think are just inherent to a latex mask.”

Dixon worked closely with Hammerhead’s ace programmer, Thad Beier to modify two of their existing programs, combining them to make it feasible to change the look of the Shadowbuilder throughout the film. “It added a weird, kind of swimming, shimmering, kind of wet look, that there is no

way you could get from conventional makeup. I’m really very happy that we had to do it, because I think we ended up with a monster that looks unlike any you’ve ever seen before.”

“This really points to one of the great things about the digital technologies, that you can make a radical change like that late in the game and not be compromised by it,” said Dixon.

The enhancements of the Shadowbuilder mask, combined with other new shots, tripled the number of effects scenes Hammerhead would perform for the film. The work ended up spread

that’s my work.”

The creature’s maturation had several stages, the last of which found Jackson’s body padded and prosthetic neck pieces and head added to create a more imposing form. For the climactic battle between Vassey and Shadowbuilder, two huge wings were also added. These were so heavy that two assistants had to stand behind Jackson and operate them with rod attachments. Dixon and the Hammerhead staff would later digitally remove the wing operators from the scene, leaving only the SHADOWBUILDER in full demonic form.

“The idea of a ‘monster’ made of shadows was very appealing,” recalled Dixon. “It seemed to present many visual opportunities, as well as challenges.” For the film’s visuals, Dixon questioned himself as to “What is scary about shadows? They aren’t themselves threatening, but they point to something that is. I’d like to think the film will make people look twice into the dark corners we encounter everywhere.”

To realize Dixon’s concepts on film, he and Beier developed custom software to create what Dixon describes as “a kind of smoky material that looks like octopus ink underwater. This visually provides the transformation between the shadows and the physical object it threatens.” In addition, Dixon also approached the film’s overall color scheme with an eye toward visually conveying the encroaching threat of the Shadowbuilder. The early parts of the film, which introduce us to the town of Grand River, depict small town life with warm colors; yellow, red, and orange. As

the Shadowbuilder’s presence intensifies, the colors themselves begin to mute. The latter portions of the film are dominated by dark greys, greens, purples and browns—colors of the eternal night that may soon engulf the town.

The actual production of BRAM STOKER’S SHADOWBUILDER seemed at times to be as doomed as its fictional setting. “We were really hounded by weather. It was only a 32 day shoot, and there were heavy rains for 7 of the first 10 days,” recalled Dixon. “It’s a combat mode. We were running from the rain. Locations were drenched, we just had to scramble for whatever we could shoot, wherever we could shoot.” The neophyte director quickly became a battle-scarred veteran, “There were times when I had to literally stand my actors in front of a bush and say, ‘okay, I know we haven’t had time to block this or rehearse it, but if you don’t say these words right now, this whole thing is going to fall apart.’” One of the great lessons for Dixon was a realization of

12 year-old Chris Hatcher (Kevin Zegers) seeks to protect his soul at the approach of a solar eclipse, as the timeless force seeks to undo creation itself.



out over four months, with as many as 10 animators working on it. "Visually, the fact that we had dark effects in a dark environment took a lot of tuning," said Dixon. Everyone handled multiple responsibilities to get it done in time. Marie's chief job had been that of visual effects art director, responsible for keeping a sense of visual order between the different effects shots Hammerhead executed. However, she also animated some of the film's most challenging shots including dog shadows peeling away from a wall to become the Shadowbuilder's Devil Dogs, and several of the onslaught of effects shots in the film's concluding battle. Dixon himself handled about 60 of the effects shots.

"The toughest one took about a week," recalled the director. "And I think I set the record with one I completed in two hours. The great thing is that it was for us. There was no need to make a videotape of the scene, no need to schedule a meeting, no need to run across town for approval. No one to come back to you unhappy with the results. If we were happy, the client was happy."

With the job completed and both October Films and Live Entertainment courting the film for distribution and possible theatrical release, the Hammerhead team is looking forward to their future producing projects. Dixon, Shah and Chuba are attached as producers to SUPERNOVA, a script written by Chuba and currently optioned and in development by United Artists.

Hammerhead is independently developing an action-thriller with a science fiction element and CROSSBONES, which Dixon describes as "a kind of family film, with a digitally created main character."

But more than anything, the Hammerhead team is just looking to take it to the next level. "We're kind of on the cusp," said Chuba. "It was a dream, and now we can see it as a reality, but we aren't there yet. It's like being a bunch of good triple-A ball players, right on the verge of breaking into the majors. We're going to have to hit a few more home runs, but I think we're going to make it." □

Jazz (Charlotte Sullivan) and Crazy Covey (Tony Todd), a recluse who once encountered the demon.



HAMMERHEAD

FULL-SERVICE MAGIC

From CGI to film production, this young firm can do it all.

By John Thonen

It was a situation that could demoralize directors, break budgets and bankrupt production companies. Jamie Dixon, director of BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER, realized that doing the film as envisioned was going to require over three times the budgeted effects shots. That total equaled films with 20 times the budget of SHADOWBUILDER's.

But Dixon had an edge: Hammerhead Productions.

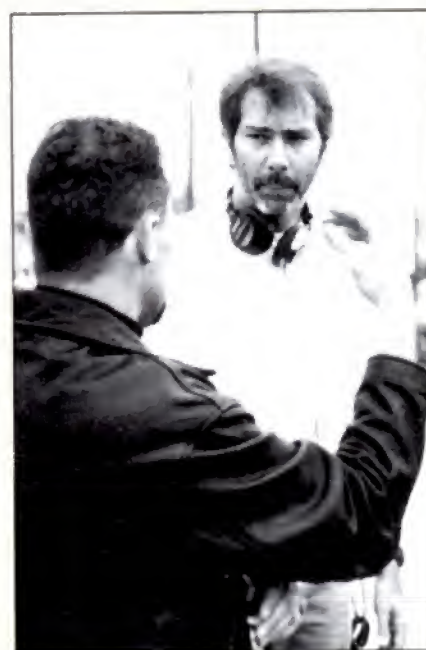
As one of the founders of the up and coming digital effects house, Dixon

knew that his partners wouldn't balk at the additional work load. He knew this because Hammerhead was also one of the film's producers. "It makes a difference when you're the client," laughed Dixon.

From its humble origins as a digital effects boutique, using rented computers and working out of free office space, Hammerhead Productions has come a remarkable distance in a scant three years. CGI effects work on the likes of VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN, ROMEO & JULIET, KAZAM, BATMAN & ROBIN, SPAWN, FLUBBER and TITANIC have transformed the struggling start-up business. Today, hammerhead is quartered in a 4,000 square-foot house nestled on four acres in the hills of Studio City. There's even a pool.

Gratifying though their success may be, Hammerhead partners Dan Chuba, Jamie Dixon, Than Beir and Rebecca Marie view it as only a means to an end. "We don't want to grow to compete with ILM or Digital Domain, concentrating on effects alone," said Chuba. "We would like to think we are developing a digital studio, one that will have a slate of diverse films in production. Projects that we have developed and which utilize our directors and animators."

SHADOWBUILDER's production was a major step towards Hammerhead's found-



Hammerhead effects chief Jamie Dixon (r) directs Michael Rooker (l) as renegade priest Jacob Vassey.

ing goals, but things weren't always so rosy. Barely a year earlier they were operating out of free office space at Imperial Entertainment. They had little money and no computers—crucial elements in the digital effects business. But more importantly, what they *did* have was an ample supply of experience and ambition.

The company's founders had all come from Pacific Data Images, where they had worked on TOYS, HEARTS AND SOULS, T2 and other effects-laden films. PDI co-workers Dixon, Dan Chuba, Thad

Beier and Rebecca Marie were frustrated with their lack of creative and financial participation in the films they worked on. When PDI decided to close up their L.A. office, the quartet of conspirators made a risky decision to go it alone. "We knew staying here was necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of not only servicing pictures, but creating them," said Dixon. Chuba added, "One of our key goals was to own part of what we produce. We want to be primarily a production company, a creator of ideas, which we then support with our visual effect capabilities."

At its birth, those capabilities were the company's greatest asset. While the Hammerhead team are only in their mid to late 30s, they are veterans in the young world of digital effects. Collectively they have worked on over 100 films with early work that includes the groundbreaking morph-effects for Michael Jackson's BLACK AND WHITE video. Dixon, who developed the top software for wire removal and repair of damaged film, is widely considered one of the founding forces in the digital effects revolution. Marie adds years of experience as an effects supervisor and art director, while Chuba has an extensive understanding of the effects industry thanks to time at



Hammerhead enhanced the Shadowbuilder (above) using a filter that shrank bright areas and expanded dark ones. Below Footage of the mask, designed by Francois Dugenais and worn by Andrew Jackson.



PDI and as production head at John Dykstra's Apogee. Beier is also a CGI veteran as a programmer and digital artist.

The CGI rebels initially rented a \$525.00 a month apartment to use as their first official offices. But for all their experience, the fledgling company was badly in need of income. While still at PDI, producer Alan Marshall had chosen the Hammerhead team to do work on his film SHOWGIRLS. When the quartet left he followed the talent. In an act of faith rare in the film industry, Marshall not only hired them, he advanced \$75,000 for the equipment to do the job. Hammerhead's work on SHOWGIRLS was largely "fix-it," the trickiest of which was harness and wire removal for a scene where a woman is invisibly raised from a stage.

Soon after SHOWGIRLS, Oliver Stone sought out Marie for NIXON, where he needed actor Anthony Hopkins to replace the late president in existing photos and film. Then even more past contacts began to bring work to the low-overhead micro-moguls. Within the next 18 months they would work on ROMEO AND JULIET, DRAGONHEART, VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN, KAZAM and half a dozen others.

While all this work was under way Imperial had come across a project they saw as

a perfect vehicle for a joint production. BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER. In exchange for a bargain rate on the film's effects, Hammerhead became production partners in the film. Hammerhead took a major step toward their ultimate goal of creating motion pictures and, as Imperial head Ash Shah put it, "We're getting the ILM or Digital domain look at a tenth of the cost."

With SHADOWBUILDER's production problems past, thanks in part to a new Beier program, the Hammerhead team has most recently worked on BATMAN AND ROBIN, FLUBBER, SPAWN, Oliver Stone's U-TURN (aka STRAY DOGS) and TITANIC. For the latter film Dixon was contacted personally by James Cameron. "I just can't say

“Film has always been the business of illusion but now the illusion is getting even better every day...It's a brave new world for film.”

—Director Jamie Dixon—

no to the man," he laughed. "Film is really a very small community. It's based mostly on personal relationships that you build and maintain over the years. If you manage to become a 'hero' on some production, by solving a problem, then they are going to want to work with you again," explained Dixon.

"As far as directors go there's only a few guys out there that really understand what can be done [in CGI]—James Cameron, Bob Zemeckis—but there's not many people in that club," said Dixon. "Film has always been a business of illusion, but now the illusion is getting better every day. We are just barely scratching the surface of what digital effects can do. We did a film where we improved the complexion of a young actress. There are others out there who have added hair to the head of a balding star, or given a digital breast-job or butt-tuck to an actress. It's a brave new world for film. We want to be part of that redefining of the industry. To help lead the way."

Chuba added, "The bar is raising every summer, raised to a whole new level of expectations. I'm not saying Hammerhead is the future of movies, but I think we will be part of that future." □

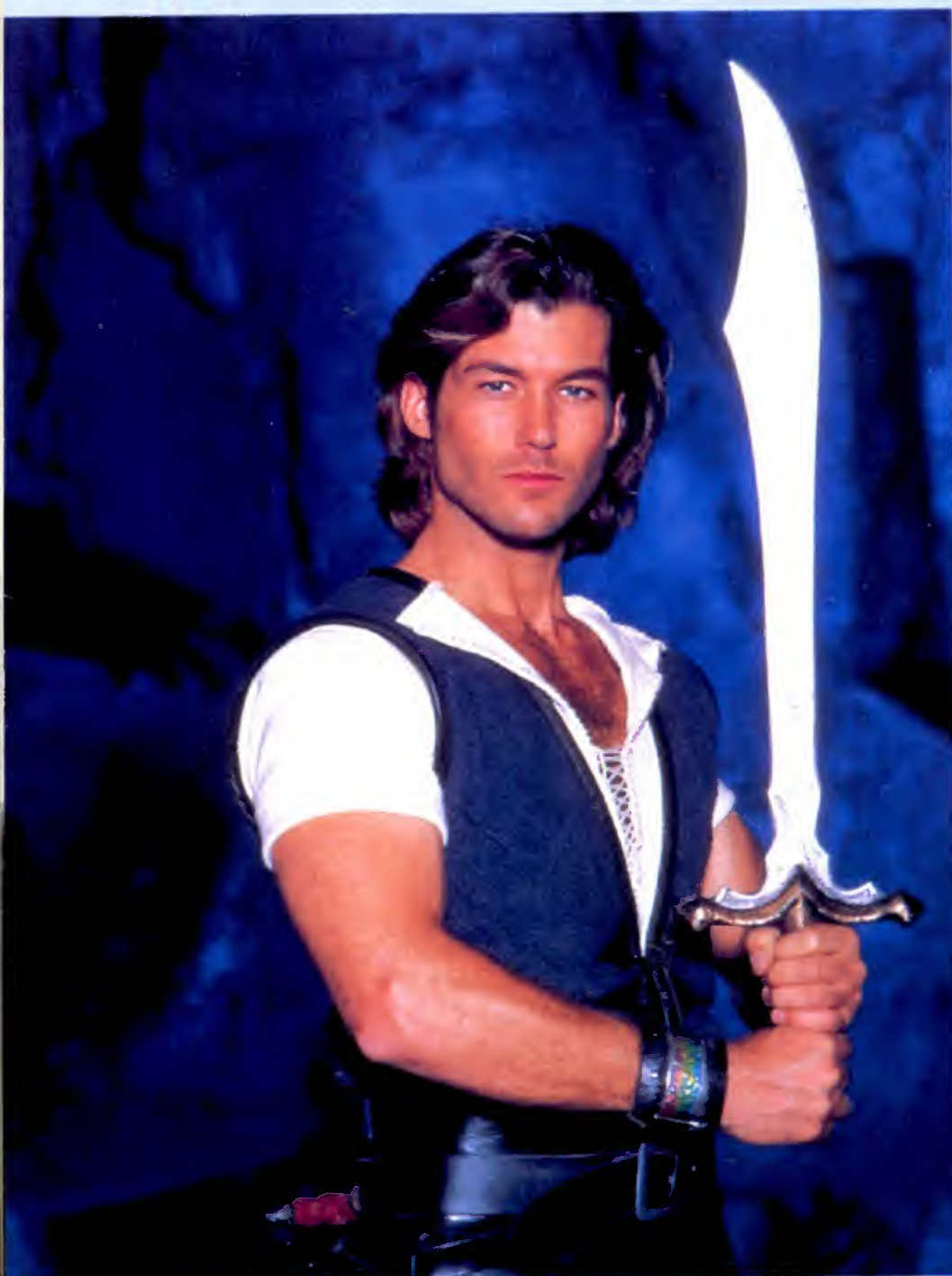
Finler (Richard McMillan) grapples with a work light in the church basement to ward-off the Shadowbuilder as he seeks human souls to gain corporeal form, digital effects by Hammerhead Productions.



Sinbad

The Series

Caliber's Neil Williamson directs Harryhausen-style animation.



Zen Gessner stars as Sinbad in the syndicated series produced by All American Television and Canada's Atlantis films, shot on location in South Africa.

By Dan Scapperotti

While the Columbia Pictures' Sinbad movies had Ray Harryhausen, *THE ADVENTURES OF SINBAD*, the South African filmed television series, has Neil Williamson bringing to cinematic life those mythological creatures set to plague the most famous of sailors. Williamson heads Toronto-based Caliber Digital Pictures, an animation and digital visual effects studio. The ten-year-old company is also producing effects for *EARTH: THE FINAL CONFLICT*. Not only does Williamson act as animation director on the series, he also directed a couple of episodes. "We put the boat in the water because there's no real boat," said Williamson.

After being awarded the SINBAD contract at the beginning of 1996, Williamson flew to South Africa. While almost all of the effects are done in Canada, Williamson spent two months in Capetown setting up the digital unit, hiring local talent and directly supervising the effects preparation for the first three shows.

"The pilot was very ambitious," Williamson said. "My approach to the show is the Harryhausen tradition. Harryhausen was one of the reasons I was so excited to get my hands on the



Aping the effects look of the work of stop-motion master Ray Harryhausen.

show. We've done skeleton warriors, the harpies and a couple of other creatures that are Harryhausen-inspired. We've done bats with human heads. 'The Sacrifice' had a neat monster called the Caman in it, like the Ymir from *20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH*. The story was kind of a King Kong lift in a way."

For last year's season finale, "The Vengeance of Rumina" Williamson got a chance to direct, and featured Harryhausen-styled staples like harpies and skeleton warriors. The producers' mandate was to come up with a splashy ending for the season. But, with a couple of strings attached. "We couldn't create any new monsters," Williamson explained, "but we could use any of the models that we had developed previously in the season. What we decided to go for was very large scale—kind of a *BRAVEHEART* meets *EVIL DEAD* approach. We wanted to raise the jeopardy for Sinbad and the crew. We wanted to increase the scope of the show more than we'd done previously. That's kind of a theme we've picked up on this year, doing a lot more matte paintings and big shots to make the whole thing a bit more cinematic and



The Ymir from the second season's premiere of *THE ADVENTURES OF SINBAD*, digital effects supervised by Neil Williamson of Toronto's Calibre Designs.

to place the story geographically and dramatically. There are 190 effects shots in that show. It's a bit over the top."

Williamson used motion capture technology to create the skeleton fight. "One of the things that really sells a shot is interaction," said Williamson. "It's one thing to cut to a monster, cut to Sinbad, cut to the monster, but it's great when you can connect your heroes with the monsters. It helps sell the believability of it. We were able to do that really effectively with the skeleton warriors because we could go to green screen work. We'd have them fighting a stunt guy in a green suit with a green sword that's been hooked up to a motion capture suit so they're really hitting on each other. In post we replace the stunt man and his exact motions with the skeleton warrior. You do a few of those shots and then you cut to less interactive shots and you can get away with it."

Motion capture technology requires an actor, or stuntman, to get into a specially designed green suit which has witness points at the wrists, the shoulders, the pelvis, the top of the heads, the elbows, and the feet. Whatever movements that per-

son does in the suit in real time is recorded into the computer. "We take that data and apply it to the 3D computer creature," said Williamson. "The creature will do exactly what the human performer was doing. It doesn't work for everything and nothing will replace good animation done by good computer animators, but it really helps sell a lot of stuff like that. It worked perfectly for the skeleton warriors."

“We decided to go for a very large scale kind of a BRAVEHEART meets EVIL DEAD approach. We raised the jeopardy.”

—Animation Director Neil Williamson—

On a TV series budget, Williamson said Calibre is performing miracles each week. "For the pilot, we produced 140 effects shots in three and a half weeks," he said. "We get a cut of the first unit material and in three weeks, four weeks if we're lucky, we deliver the completed shots."

The big set pieces are the most impressive of the digital effects. However much of the effort goes into less astounding shots like the magic-related scenes that may only call for a glowing bracelet or compositing practical effects. "We also do morphing, matte paintings, and dealing with the boat," said Williamson. "Putting the boat where it's supposed to be realistically."

Dealing with short shooting schedules and six thousand miles of ocean necessitates a good deal of planning, budgeting and trust. Since time is short the customary approval process must be curtailed as much as possible. Both the producers and Williamson must have a trust in each others' judgment to make

the process work. "There's an approval process that we go through," said Williamson. "They have to trust us to do our job. If they're not happy with something we'll go back and change it. Pretty much things stay the same once we get into it. We send out concept sketches and if they're approved we move on. If it's a particularly complex skinned creature like the Gryphon—actually two gryphons in 'The Gryphon's Tale' which are pretty cool—it may take more time. Once David Gerber, an executive producer, signs off on the monster, then we build it in the computer. Then we'll texture it and paint it up and try to get everything ready to go and get that model completely ready to animate the day that the shots from South Africa walk in the door. As soon as we get the shots it's like a race to the finish line to do the best job that we can in the time that we've got. That's the reality. You could go on forever tweaking animation and tweaking composites and stuff."

Although Sinbad and his

The Ymir from "The Sacrifice," Harryhausen style stop-motion look rendered with the ease of CGI.





hardy band are sailing from one adventure to another, his boat, *The Nomad*, really isn't that seaworthy. In fact the craft sits in Gordon's Bay, outside of Capetown, on top of a barge. For its initial outings a miniature was built in Toronto and set sail only with the help of some green screen work.

The actual boat is an outdoor set which gives the production the flexibility to move the boat around to face the open sea. In a move that could have proved disastrous, the floating set was towed out to sea one day with all hands aboard.

"It actually sits about eight feet off the water on these big pontoons," Williamson explained. "It's not particularly seaworthy. We did some helicopter and boat to boat shooting. We then composited to remove the barge that was underneath and we took wakes from the boat



Neil Williamson, effects supervisor for Toronto's Calibre Digital Pictures, doing an hour show in just 3 to 4 weeks. Above: Caliber's sea serpent for "The Sacrifice."

that was towing it which was about the same size. You really can't tell that it's not sitting in the water sailing along under its own power. We wanted to get the real people running around on deck and climbing the rigging that was missing from the [modelwork] first season."

With only one effects supervisor actually on the Capetown set, most of the communica-

tions between Caliber and South Africa is done via telecommunications, including multiple ISUD transmissions. "We'll get a first draft and we'll break it down and then we get on the phone with Africa in weekly production calls," explained Williamson. "We can beam footage over to them if they need to see something or they can beam stuff back to us.

Another Harryhausen homage, the skeleton warriors of first season finale "The Vengeance of Rumina," shot with motion capture.



We'll review the effects on the show they're prepping. They get a script, if they're lucky, two weeks before they shoot it so there's not a lot of time to get the prep done, especially for something that's as effects intensive as this is. We'll go through the breakdown and quote it. All the producers will see that and then decide what they'll rewrite to make it more shootable. The same goes for the production side. These are shot in seven days, maybe another two for second unit. It's very ambitious for the budget."

Matte paintings are indispensable and there are usually at least three or four mattes to set up the show's geography and locales. "We have a lot of matte extensions," said Williamson, "where we're putting something in the landscape that isn't there or taking something out of the landscape that we don't want. They're also used for interiors where they only build the set high enough for medium shots and then on masters and wide shots like something that has a huge cathedral ceiling or a cave set that goes only so high, we'll extend that up to expand the scope of the show. There is beautiful and extremely varied geography in Capetown and that's why they're shooting there. They have everything from forests and deserts to coast lines, but it's a modern city with radio masts and roads and airplanes and everything, so it's our job to make everything look like it's in the fourth century." □

The Sultan of Sinbad

Series creator Ed Naha emulates idol Ray Harryhausen.

By Dan Scapperotti

The legendary Ray Harryhausen has been an inspiration to dozens of prominent filmmakers over the years. No one's been more inspired by his stop-motion mythological creatures than writer Ed Naha, the creative force behind television's *ADVENTURES OF SINBAD*, which sailed into its second season last September. As a kid Naha was fascinated by *THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD*. "I started doing little stop-motion movies when I was a kid," he said. "Through a series of blunders I ended up writing low-budget movies for Roger Corman. *CAMP BOTTOM OUT* and *WIZARDS OF THE LOST*

KINGDOM, which was really reprehensible. Working for Roger, whatever can go wrong does go wrong about 20 times a day." After writing *The Films of Roger Corman: Brilliance on a Budget*, Naha moved out to California. He walked into Corman's office one day and told the producer "I think it's time I wrote a script for you." And his film career was born.

"I always had a dream of doing Harryhausen-esque movies," said Naha, "and I ended up writing *HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS*, which I always thought was a Harryhausen-type film. After that I wanted to do a movie I entitled *THE FINAL VOYAGE OF SINBAD*. Everyone politely showed me the door." Naha found a home for the idea—as series television—with producer Jamie Waldron at All American Television.

The first season the show was on the air Naha produced eight scripts. For the second season he wrote another ten. "If the first season was Ray Harryhausen meets George Pal, the second season was sort of Ray Harryhausen meets Hammer Films," he said proudly. "We boosted up the action to unbelievable amounts. One hour in syndication you have a teaser and four acts. We usually



The ensemble cast (l to r) George Buza as Doubar, Mariah Shirley as Bryn, Gessner, Tim Progosh as Firouz (seated) and Oris Erheuro as Rongar. Inset: Naha.

have five action set pieces per show. In 'Castle Keep' we had about a hundred extras. When we had a fight scene there were 25-50 people involved so it's really cinematic in that respect. It's a very difficult show to write for because you have an ensemble as opposed to a Hercules and Xena where you have the main character and a sidekick. We have six individuals."

The second season brought extensive changes to the show's narrative and the characters. Gone was Maeve, the beautiful sorcerer's apprentice, played by Jacqueline Collen. In her stead came the mysterious Bryn, played by newcomer Mariah Shirley. Zen Gesner, Sinbad himself, took on a more mature look. Noted Naha, "If you trace the progression of the feeling of Sinbad when Harryhausen did the *THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD*, its focus was juvenile. You had great classic monsters. The cyclops, period, is classic, but by the time that Ray and Charles Schneer got around to doing *JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS* the tone was a lot harder. You lost Hylas on Talos' Island; you had a bereaved Hercules. You had most of the main sidekicks dying in the skeleton fight at the end. It had a harder

edge to it. I think we went for a harder edge the second year and as a result there's more mayhem as well as exploring some darker things like vampirism and lycanthropy."

Another of Naha's movie favorites are those produced by Hammer Films. He loved them as a kid and even today will go out of his way to get Hammer tapes from England. "The Beast of Basra" became his ode to werewolf movies. "One of my favorite movies was *CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF*," he said. "I thought it would be fun to have a werewolf episode, yet have a kind of twist to it, like the temporary cure in *THE WEREWOLF OF LONDON*."

The Internet played a decisive role in some of the changes. On the *SINBAD* website, fans expressed their desire to see a more mature-looking hero. Naha frequently explores the site and takes fan suggestions to heart. "I actually read every post on the net because it really gives me insight into what the people who watch the show feel," said Naha.

Naha praised series lead Zen Gesner for bringing *SINBAD* to life. "He is Sinbad on and off the screen," said Naha. "He's the leader of the group down there in Capetown and he's the leader on screen as well. This is his first major role. His growth as an actor and his growth as an individual kind of mirror Sinbad's growth as a hero and as an individual."

Naha revealed that this season's finale will be a pivotal episode. "Sinbad's soul is at stake," said Naha. "We bring back Scratch, who's the Devil, from the first season and Scratch tells Sinbad, 'You've been killing a ton of people. Why don't you join my side. There's not that much difference between us.' Sinbad has to go on a quest and he's aided by someone from his past whom he doesn't recognize. That was fun for me to write." □

STEPHEN KING'S NIGHT FLIER

King collaborators and director Mark Pavia flesh out story of vampire pilot.

By Wilson Goodson

THE NIGHT FLIER is another of the almost endless stream of adaptations of writer Stephen King's work, in this case based on the short story from his collection *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*. King's fans will be happy to know that it is produced by his long-time collaborators Richard Rubinstein and Mitchell Galin, who also filmed *THINNER*, *THE STAND* and *PET SEMATARY*, and features Miguel Ferrer who previously appeared in *THE STAND*. The direct-to-video feature, currently airing on Showtime, hits video shelves in May.

The short story is primarily a character piece about a tabloid reporter, Richard Dees (Ferrer), who is tracing a serial killer who flies from small airport to small airport on the east coast. Dees is also a flier and follows the trail of bodies to Wilmington, North Carolina. The short story ends inconclusively, revealing nothing about the vampire with a pilot's license or Dees' fate. Co-producer Jack O'Donnell and director Mark Pavia, who co-wrote the script, give the audience a pay-off at the end, and fleshed-out the story by introducing another character, rookie reporter Katharine Blair (played by Julie Entwistle).

According to Pavia, "This whole film is a tragedy. It's [about] a loss of innocence. Basically this movie is about a man who sold his soul to the devil and has to pay the price."

NIGHT FLIER is the first project to be filmed by New Amsterdam Entertainment, Inc. However, its two producers, Richard Rubenstein (*THE STAND*) and Mitchell Galin (Stephen King's *GOLDEN YEARS*) who are also the primary owners of New Amsterdam, each have long careers in TV and films, and a strong connection to multimedia star Stephen King.

In the late 1970s Richard Rubenstein was



Michael H. Moss as Dwight Renfield, King's old school vampire who has entered the modern age as a pilot preying on small airports.

writing a column on videotape for a magazine called *Filmmakers Newsletter*, which he described as "sort of the 16mm indie filmmakers bible. I was the first videotape editor because I had been shooting documentaries with the first Sony portapacks which came out in late 1969."

"I met George Romero [*NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*] at the introduction of the foreign sales agent who represented George, Irvin Shapiro. The magazine assigned me to interview George. We started talking and that discussion lasted on the order of 12 years and five pictures." Rubenstein and Romero formed a company called Laurel Entertainment which they took public in 1980.

O'Donnell and Pavia also give some

back story to the vampire character, played by Michael Moss (COBB). He was converted to vampirism about the turn of the century, and chooses to wear formal clothing of that period. This is partly a tip of the hat to the classic images of vampires as is the name he uses, Dwight Renfield, the name of the character in the original novel *Dracula* played in the Bela Lugosi film by an actor named Dwight Frye. His M.O. of flying a sinister-looking plane from air field to air field results from his fascination with human flight, which he was able to follow from its earliest steps.

The decision to make a film of *The Night Flier* was a joint decision by producers Richard Rubenstein and Mitch Galin of New Amsterdam Entertainment, with King's approval.

Director and co-scripter Mark Pavia got the assignment on the strength of a short film he sent to both King and Rubenstein, a sort of homage to director George Romero.

Once they had a script there was an almost two-year period of planning and fund-raising. King had written an earlier script himself for a potential TV movie that never got off the ground. "Steve acted as a story editor and made some notes," said Rubenstein. "This is the only time I have seen him operate that way because he is generally more hands-on. If Steve is going to really get involved in the script he is really going to get involved."

King never visited the set, which is also unusual. As Rubenstein explained, "If you had Steve here, it creates an inappropriate perception about how involved he is. My partner Mitchell is more involved in the day-to-day specifics. I tend to be his reality check, and Steve is my reality check."

Star Miguel Ferrer expressed surprise to receive from director Pavia a three-ring binder "story boarding every shot in the movie, every single one, it's incredible!



Miguel Ferrer plays Richard Dees, a tabloid reporter on the trail of *THE NIGHT FLIER*. The film got a theatrical release February 6 from New Line Cinema after its airing on Showtime cable last December.

When I go home to think about the next day's lines or the scene, I could get inside his head and decide exactly how he wanted to shoot it and really visualize it. Or at least orient myself to the way he was thinking."

Howard Berger, one of the partners in the special effects company KNB (*VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN*), said he found Pavia's book "extremely useful." Director of photography David Connell (*BUFFALO GIRLS*) was also surprised to get one. "I have seen storyboards [but] storyboards are things to be broken. But he stuck by these storyboards. I think he had this visual style for the movie in his head for two years and it's really helped him a lot."

About the visual style, Connell, who admitted this is one of his first horror movies, noted, "Mark and I talked at the beginning about keeping this quite a cold movie and quite a dark movie. To me when you are making a horror film if you see everything people are not going to be scared. Suspense you put in your lighting, contrasty lighting as opposed to flat see-all lighting."

Pavia also liked to use a moving camera. "He has kept everything on the move," said Connell. "He does a lot of slow dolly-in movement, starting in wide and going into closeups."

The decision to shoot the film in Wilmington was primarily the producers'. "If you look at my productions dealing with Steve's material," says Richard Rubinstein, "I very often, for at least part of the movie, go to the location Stephen has written into the story because that's where he wrote it, or that has some sort of connection for him. The story winds-up in Wilmington and that adds a little magic shooting in Wilmington. I believe in magic, I believe the dark woods

up in Maine had an effect on *PET SEMATARY*."

It is impossible to consider making a horror film in the current political climate without wondering about complaints of excessive violence.

Rubinstein insisted, "I wouldn't make a *FRIDAY [THE 13TH]*, I wouldn't make a *Freddy [NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET]*. In this script, there is a very sexy lady playing the lead, but there is no mixture of sex and violence in this movie. Nobody is cutting up nubile 16-year-old camp counselors in the woods. This is a roller-coaster ride, very traditional and pure, a journalist's search for the truth."

Galín said he might allow his two pre-teen daughters to see *NIGHT FLIER* but since they visit his movie's sets, and have seen some of the dailies, "they know the difference between fantasy and reality in the terms of the typical movie, because they have seen some of the stuff happen."

"On the other hand I took them to see *THE CRAFT* and I was the one ducking behind the seat. I mean I took them because they wanted to see it and they enjoyed it,

Veteran King producers Mitch Galín (l) and Richard P. Rubinstein (r) flank first-time director Mark Pavia on the set in North Carolina.



"I'm interested in pure cinema, where I tell stories with pictures and imagery, bringing the story to the screen as visually as possible."

—Director Mark Pavia—

but at the same time they said, 'I know how that is done.' I saw the snakes and ducked and they were laughing at me."

NIGHT FLIER was shot without a domestic American distributor arranged ahead of time. This was a conscious decision on the part of the producers, in Richard Rubinstein's words, "to make this movie without too many cooks in the kitchen." It is being co-financed by New Amsterdam Entertainment Inc., Stardust International and Medusa Film. Stardust International handles distribution outside the English speaking world and Latin America.

In terms of cost, Rubinstein estimated "a comparable budget would be \$10 million. We deferred our fees. If I paid the three of us [Rubinstein, Galín, and King] then you would have \$10 million."

Co-producer O'Donnell and director Pavia can be described as grown-up fan boys. They both grew up in the Midwest, watching *Creature Features*, a package of Universal horror classics with a few Japanese and Hammer films that were distributed to TV stations around the country for many years.

According to Pavia, "When I was ten years old, I saw *JAWS*, which was the most influential film of my life. I walked out of the theater and said, 'This is what I want to do with my life.' I was ten years old and knew I was going to be a director. I would go to the movie over and over and over again until I figured out how they were made. Once I figured out how a director achieved a shot, then I would move on."

Pavia started making super 8mm movies when he was eight years old. "My first film was a two-minute version of *DRACULA*," he said. "Isn't that ironic?" He continued making short films all through his teens, about one a year, and received a scholarship to Columbia College in Chicago on the strength of his film *LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER*, based on a short story by Roald Dahl (*James and the Giant Peach*).

O'Donnell had one short film under his belt before entering Columbia. "They give you the motivation to go out and do

NIGHT FLIER

MIGUEL FERRER

The cult bad guy plays another guy you love to hate.

By William Wilson Goodson

Miguel Ferrer (HOT SHOTS: PART DEUX) plays the character of the tabloid reporter Richard Dees, who pursues the NIGHT FLIER. In the original story Dees is presented by King as cold, unsympathetic and arrogant. When asked about the character Ferrer replied, "I understand where you would draw that conclusion but I cannot approach it that way. I think on some level if an actor makes those negative choices about a character he really locks himself into something he shouldn't because there is nothing more boring than watching someone up there twisting his mustache tying poor Nell to the tracks.

"I think he is very intolerant of ineptitude. He is certainly a loner, very short on social skills but I think he is very, very good at what he does. I think he could have made it in the straight press, but he is fascinated with the seamy and the twisted, the darkness, that life holds.

"It is nothing I consciously do or even understand, but when I play 'bad guys' for some strange reason there is a part of the character people identify with, or like."

To prepare for the role of the flying reporter, Ferrer spent some time with a pilot. "I used to fly [but] I hadn't been in a light plane for about 20 years and in the original draft of the script, as in the short story Dees flew a twin-engine Beechcraft. I had never flown a twin. I took some orientation in a twin and took it up a few times. I wanted to be sure I was handling the aircraft convincingly. [The film uses] a Beechcraft Bonanza, which is their high end single engine, the one with the V-Tail. A very nice airplane."

Ferrer has a long career going back to 1983, including parts in such cult items as ROBOCOP, STAR TREK III and TWIN PEAKS. He had the lead in his own short-lived series BROKEN BADGES, where he had a rare heroic role.

About his NIGHT FLIER's first-time director Mark Pavia, Ferrer noted, "He is unlike any first-timer I have worked with. I have worked with some great directors, Paul Verhoeven (ROBOCOP), John Badham (ANOTHER STAKEOUT), Tony Scott (REVENGE), David Lynch (TWIN



Miguel Ferrer as Richard Dees, tabloid reporter for Inside View, stalking a vampire in Stephen King territory.

PEAKS), really, really heavy hitters, and Mark, I think, is the most prepared guy I have ever worked with."

About his first-time leading lady Julie Entwisle, Ferrer noted, "They're extraordinarily lucky to stumble on to her. I wouldn't have believed it if they told me it was her first picture. She's great. Her instincts are wonderful."

About her co-star, Entwisle said, "The first day of filming, I was scared to death. Mark said I looked like a deer stuck in the headlights and Miguel took my hand and offered me advice. He has been very special to me and helped me out and gave me little tricks of the trade."

The son of actor/director Jose Ferrer (MOULIN ROUGE) and singer Rosemary Clooney (WHITE CHRISTMAS) Ferrer started his career as a drummer. "I turned professional at about age 17 and lived in England about two years, toured extensively with different groups when I was living in Los Angeles and New York. I did a lot of recordings as well."

After turning actor, Ferrer and his childhood friend Billy Mummy (BABYLON 5)

formed a band with several comic book professionals called Seduction of the Innocent which played at several comic book conventions. The band's name was taken from a book by psychiatrist Fredric Wertheim blaming comic books for the 1950's juvenile delinquency problems. It has broken up but Ferrer still performs occasionally with Mummy in another band called the Jenerators. "It is basically me and a couple of extremely competent studio guys. We play a couple of times a month around Los Angeles when everybody is in town. I keep my hand in but I am very happy not to have to make a living at it anymore."

Ferrer and screenwriter Ed Neumeier (STARSHIP TROOPERS) have written a script which they have been trying to produce for several years, called HIT-MAN, aka TRIGGER HAPPY, "a black comedy," said Ferrer.

"It's still on our shelves and we own it outright. It will get done sooner or later."

Ferrer's next project will be MULAN, a Disney-animated movie as the voice of what he describes as the leader of a barbarian horde that is planning to conquer ancient China. "Disney is an amazing outfit. When they approached me to do this, they sent me a package of drawings and a presentation. It was absolutely amazing. Those guys know how to do it."

When asked about the current criticism of violence in American films, Ferrer replied, "It's all nonsense. So many leaders of our country cannot fix things that are really important, so they focus on minutia and say, 'Well, look what we have done, we have the v-chip, you can no longer smoke in airports, you cannot smoke in Dodger stadium, while at the same time our society is rapidly disintegrating, and it has nothing to do with television. Look at Japan, they take their fantasy very seriously. There is graphic violence and sexual content, even rape, and look at their incident of violent crime, it's virtually nonexistent."

"I think that the responsibility has to come back home at some time. I am the dad of two little boys and they are not going to see this film. Little kids have no business watching this movie until they are 16 or 17." □



William Neely as Ray Sarch falls victim to the vampire. *THE NIGHT FLIER* hits video shelves in May, based on King's short story published in the anthology *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*.

your own project," said O'Donnell of the film school. "And you meet people who want to do the same thing as you do, so you can form a core group of people to get together and do what they love."

Pavia and O'Donnell met in a script-writing class at Columbia. "We are a writing team," said Pavia. "I cannot imagine writing separately any more."

Pavia and O'Donnell wrote and produced a 50-minute short *UNEXCUSED ABSENCE* with Januza Kaminski, who later earned an Academy Award for *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, acting as an unpaid director of photography.

Then after a three-year gap, in which they wrote three unproduced feature scripts, they finished the 40-minute *DRAG*. This took most of the money they made at different jobs to finish. They sent copies to a number of people in the film industry, most importantly Rubinstein and Stephen King. They were working on a new independent project *SLICE* when they received a phone call from Rubinstein.

According to O'Donnell, "[Rubinstein] flew us in and Mark and I broke it [*NIGHT FLIER*] down on index cards, each scene on an index card and we brought in some horror music, some Christopher Young soundtracks, and had a big story meeting that went very well. They [Richard Rubinstein, Mitchell Galin, Stephen King and Neil Stevens, their story editor] liked what we had to say, so they hired us officially to write the script from there."

When asked how one goes about adapting a short character-based story into a feature film, Pavia replied, "Before anything else, I was a Stephen King fan, I have been a Stephen

King fan since I was ten years old. I have certain goals in life and one of my goals is to write a Stephen King motion picture and when I got the opportunity I jumped at it. Some of the King adaptations are laughable and I just wanted to do his work justice and be faithful as possible to the tone of his work. So every scene in the short story is in our picture. We had to expand it to make it work for a two-hour movie so we kept true to the tone, true to the character.

"Stephen was actively involved he read every draft we did and gave us suggestions and six drafts later we had a finished script."

Pavia listed Hitchcock and Spielberg as the two directors from whom he has learned the most, including the importance of detailed planning and storyboarding. "I cannot go into a movie not knowing how I am going to shoot it," said Pavia. "My visual attack on a picture I try to handle early in the production. I think it is crazy to go onto the set and try and make it up as you go along. I think I can give the audience much more if I know exactly how I am going to handle a certain sequence. I think about the nuances

Miguel Ferrer as Richard Dees and Jullie Entwisle as fellow reporter Katherine Blair in her motion picture debut, playing a character not found in King's story.



“The right-wingers are looking for somewhere to hang their hat and they use horror films as a coat rack.”

—Director Mark Pavia—

I can bring out more effectively by being so planned.

"My job is to bring the story to the screen as visually as possible. Movies are a visual media. It's not theater, which is about words. I think where some movies go wrong, go astray is they don't take the visual as importantly as the scripts. That's not saying the script is not important—it is. You have to have your solid foundation, but what I am interested in is pure cinema, where I tell stories with pictures and imagery."

The interest in imagery ties in with his interest in using a moving, probing camera. He has been quoted as saying, "I like my camera to move, to serpentine, to dance almost."

Both Pavia and O'Donnell like working in the horror genre. According to Pavia, "I think these films are cathartic. You go to the cinema and sit there and see these situations and you are in the safety of a theater. I don't think these pictures contribute to violence. I think if unstable people go, there might be a problem, but they are going to do it anyway. They are going to do it watching the six o'clock news. I think the right-wingers are looking for somewhere to hang their hat and they use horror films as a coat rack."

O'Donnell insisted, "I have watched violent movies, Kung Fu movies, horror movies, and I have no urge to emulate what I see. I cannot speak for anybody else but I grew up with it all my life and I abhor real violence."

As for why people enjoy horror movies, O'Donnell thinks, "Because it's safe—you know, the heart starts pumping, the blood's racing, you tense up. I am not going to say it's a sexual experience, but you know you have the little foreplay of suspense and then—*Pow!*—you scream or you laugh, you release, let go, it's just that adrenaline rollercoaster rider that I think people enjoy."

The two filmmakers are unsure of their next project. They still have a set of finished scripts they would like to make and New Amsterdam has an option for Pavia to direct one more film. □

TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS

Guy Maddin's unique vision returns with this hallucinatory love melodrama.

By Alan Jones

TALES FROM THE GIMLI HOSPITAL, ARCHANGEL and CAREFUL have propelled Winnipeg director Guy Maddin to prominence as a true Canadian eccentric. Using an archly histrionic style borrowed from the silent film era which he loves, wacky humor and an ever-increasingly bizarre world view, Maddin has eked out an iconoclastic niche for himself on the world's festival circuit. A retrospective of his strangely hypnotic and irreverent work was mounted at the recent Sitges Fantasy Festival

and, in France, where his films always make money, the 41 year-old was recently honored with an all-day Maddin-athon in Paris.

His latest, and most accessible film to date, THE TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS, opened in Canada in October, 1997 and gets launched internationally at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival. The film opens in the U.S. in April. A bitter-sweet love story set in the mystical land of Mandragora where the sun never sets, Maddin's fantasy LA RONDE is yet another unclassifiable milestone in a truly unique career. Yet it's not the film he set out to make after nurturing the global release of CAREFUL.



Alice Krige as Zephyr and Ross MacMillan as Matthew share a romantic interlude in TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS, Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin's (inset) latest surreal exercise.

"I had another film ready to go titled THE DYKEMASTER'S DAUGHTER," said Maddin. "It was an operetta set in a Netherlandish version of my hometown, a place of brutish manual labor, ice hockey and the finer arts. It was actually a nice spin on the classic E. T. A Hoffman tale 'The Sandman' in which an inventor falls in love with the automaton he's built—a thing of perfect beauty but with no personality whatsoever. The ballet 'Coppelia' was based on the same story.

"I decided to reverse genders and have a woman and a doctor in love with the most beautiful man in the world. In their attempts to humanize him, they start installing switches and

cogs to control his sexual preferences. I had Christopher Lee and Leni Riefenstahl [the German director of the 1938 Nazi propaganda classic TRIUMPH OF THE WILL] all lined up to star when the project collapsed on the eve of production. I blame myself. I was too complacent and naive over the financial side."

Describing himself as "Staggered for about a year" over that debacle, Maddin took up the offer of some television work just to pay the bills. "But I don't want to talk about that, it was a horrible embarrassment," he said. So Maddin threw all his efforts into a script written solely by his old collaborator George Toles.

Noted Maddin, "I always like to start my film ideas with something analogous to Luis Bunuel's eyeball slash in UN CHIEN ANDALOU—an irritant, a grain of sand that will hopefully produce a pearl someday. ARCHANGEL was supposed to be a pro-war movie to annoy the generally liberal art house audience. By the time it was released, the Gulf War had everyone frothing at the mouth for blood, so that didn't work. CAREFUL was a pro-incest movie that I thought would at least irritate my mother! THE TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS was centered around a romantic hero and

manipulative loner who loved blasting the smithereens out of cute furry animals."

However, Maddin and Toles decided that basic idea wasn't enough and looked around for further literary inspiration to add texture to their story. "I love the work of the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun," said Maddin. "He wrote mostly in the last decade of the 19th century, but lived long enough to be accused of being a Nazi collaborator. At the age of 96 his sympathetic remarks about Hitler disgraced his career. He wrote these great loner, unrequited man-type stories. 'Hunger' is the most famous. We based our script on the spirit of another of his books, Pan. We ended up having to pay

DIRECTOR GUY MADDIN

“I always like to start my film ideas with something analogous to Luis Bunuel’s eyeball slash in UN CHIEN ANDALOU—an irritant, a grain of sand that will hopefully produce a pearl...”



Krige as Zephyr, one of the residents of an ostrich bestiary who encounters the delirium of unrequited love in a remote region where the sun never sets.

\$20,000 to his estate because my producer forgot to clear the rights. We never hid the fact that *Pan* was our inspiration but, as I’m incapable of doing a faithful adaptation of anything, I was a bit annoyed about that.”

THE TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS centers on Peter Glahn, a former political prisoner, who returns home to Mandragora and finds himself caught up in a complex set of passionately amorous connections, many of which are destined to be unrequited. The characters Glahn encounters are typical of Maddin’s singular vision: an ostrich farming sister, a woman married to the forest, a statue of Venus and a hypnotic doctor. Once again, working with a palette of vibrant colors, and his CAREFUL director of photography Michael Marshall, Maddin creates a magical hallucinatory landscape set in an unspecified bygone age where

weirdness is the norm and anything could happen.

“It’s a big melodrama and a tribute to the work of Douglas Sirk [the director of the classic Fifties weepies IMITATION OF LIFE and MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION],” said Maddin. “I adore his over the top atmospheres orchestrated with schmaltzy music. I played a lot of Debussy and Frank Skinner [Sirk’s favored composer] to my music composer John McCulloch. Out of the 91 minutes running time, 72 minutes are musically scored. And it’s in stereo. Yes, Guy Maddin abandons his primitive sound ethic! So get the projectionist to turn up the volume when it plays near you.”

Another first for Maddin is the use of famous name actors to play the lead roles. Alice (GHOST STORY) Krige, Shelley (THE SHINING) Duvall and Frank (THE RIDDLER)

Gorshin invade the enclosed Maddin universe along with Pascale Bussieres, R.H. Thompson, Ross McMillan and Nigel Whitney. Don’t look for the latter’s name on the credits as Glahn though because he removed it from the picture when he was re-dubbed by another actor.

Maddin said, “I met Alice Krige through the Brothers Quay. She was in their film THE INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA. We’ve been Fax pen pals for years and we all met up at the Telluride Film Festival where their film was shown. It’s so much easier casting someone over a cup of coffee, giving them a script to read, and telling them I just saw you in the movie when they know you’re not lying. Her ethereal quality was perfect for the role of Zephyr. She’s professional, a risk taker and works extremely hard. She arrived in Winnipeg ready to start shooting exactly eight hours after finishing her role as the Borg Queen in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT. I thought that was amazing.”

Shelley Duvall was cast mainly because writer George Toles had always loved her ap-

pearances in Robert Altman’s films, especially THREE WOMEN and THIEVES LIKE US. Maddin remarked, “I spent two months trying to cast a Shelley Duvall type as Amelia. Finally I thought, why don’t I just call up Shelley herself and ask her? She accepted instantly.”

Financed by Alliance Independent Films, the Canadian company behind David Cronenberg’s CRASH, THE TWILIGHT OF THE ICE NYMPHS cost \$1.25 million (Canadian) and was filmed in “a crummy little soap factory that I’m certain has given me yet another neurological disorder.” Fans may like to know there is an accompanying documentary about the making of the film titled GUY MADDIN: WAITING FOR THE TWILIGHT directed by Noam Gonick.

Maddin has high hopes for the film. “I’m at the stage now where I want to make some money,” he said. “I want to get my budgets up so I can pay people proper money for a change. I hope I can expand enough to get the sort of art house crossover someone like Peter Greenaway [director of THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER] gets.” □

Shelley Duvall as Amelia, tending the ostriches. Maddin cast name actors for the first time, with \$1.25 million from Alliance Films, his biggest budget ever.



An effective evocation of the uncanny

PHANTOMS

Dimension Films presents a NEO Motion Pictures production, in association with Raven House, Inc. Produced by Joel Soisson, Michael Leahy, Robert Pringle, and Steve Lane. Executive producers: Bob and Harvey Weinstein, and Dean Koontz. Director: Joe Chapelle. Screenplay by Dean Koontz, based on his novel. Cinematographer: Richard Clabaugh. Music: David Williams. Production designer: Deborah Raymond & Dorian Vernacchio. Costumes, Dana C. Utwack. Editor: Randolph K. Bricker. Sound (Dolby Digital), Larry Scharf. Special makeup and mechanical effects by KNB EFX Group and XFX, Inc. 1/98. 95 mins. R.

Peter O'Toole.....Dr. Timothy Flyte
Joanna Going.....Dr. Jennifer Pailey
Rose McGowan.....Lisa Pailey
Ben Affleck.....Sheriff Bryce Hammond
Liev Schreiber.....Stu Wargle
Clifton Powell.....General Leland Cooperfield

by Steve Biodrowski

Considering the track record of the talent involved (a Dean Koontz novel inspired *HIDE-AWAY*; Joe Chapelle perpetrated *HALLOWEEN 6*), *PHANTOMS* is a pleasant surprise. The novel was typical genre stuff, but it scored big in at least one important aspect: it took some traditional elements (the walking dead; an ancient, allegedly satanic evil) and infused them with a contemporary, pseudo-scientific explanation that made the events accessible to a modern reader. The film manages to translate this core idea faithfully, resulting in a film that twists its clichés into something new.

The story begins with admirable efficiency: after only minimal exposition (during a car drive beneath the opening credits), the Pailey sisters (Going and McGowan) arrive in Snowfield, only to find the small town mysteriously deserted. Car engines are running; breakfast is on the table; and numerous other signs indicate recent occupancy—but there is no sign of life. Taking the visual clichés of the *TWILIGHT ZONE* episode “Where is Everybody?” into more visceral terror, Koontz does not allow his characters the easy option of waking up to find that the mystery was all a dream. Rather, there is a very real and deadly phenomenon at work.

Director Chapelle manages to make these scenes work to an unnerving degree. The *mise-en-scène* effectively captures the escalating horror of the two characters while building suspense to an almost unbearable level. By the time Jennifer and Lisa are surrounded by shadowy, half-seen forms in a darkened hallway, the audience is ready to leap out of their seats.

Unfortunately, the highlight of the film is pretty much this open-



Ben Affleck, Rose McGowan, Joanna Going and Peter O'Toole confront *PHANTOMS* in a small town whose population has mysteriously disappeared.

ing sequence. Those shadows turn out to be sheriff's deputies, and their arrival dissipates much of the tension. The script works overtime to show that men with guns don't necessarily insure safety, but the sense of the isolation is lost. Once the script drags in the government's high-tech experts, the initial thrill is almost gone. What was a fairly distinctive piece of work, that conveyed a true sense of the uncanny, degenerates into a standard genre piece: lots of guns go off while special effects wipe out faceless victims (almost literally so—hidden within their anti-contamination suits). It's all very noisy and frantic, but without any impact whatsoever. Whereas once the film asked us to identify with the characters and their fears, now we are expected merely to sit back and marvel at the effects work.

Lost in all this confusion is the element that fueled the second half of the book: the growing religious dread experienced by the characters as the gradually come to fear that they are face-to-face not merely with an unknown predator but with the Devil himself. Occasional lip service is paid to this idea, but the film fails to inspire the sense of superstitious awe in the audience, thanks to special effects that are effectively repulsive but too tangible to suggest spiritual evil—the threat is clearly physical, *not* metaphysical.

Part of the problem is that the script eliminates most of the char-

acterization that showed the effect of the Ancient Enemy on the human survivors: the novel defined each character with a memory or an inner monologue; once this literary material was jettisoned, there was little left but generic roles. Nevertheless, Going, McGowan, and Affleck work hard to convey a sense of human beings trapped in an unfamiliar and inescapable predicament. Only Liev Schreiber wears out his welcome, thanks to the film's insistence on overusing his disgusting-creep routine, even to the point of having him come back from the dead as one of the Ancient Enemy's “phantoms.”

The film regains some of its lost momentum near the end, when Dr. Timothy Flyte (O'Toole) attempts to lure the Ancient Enemy from its hiding place. Throughout the film, the actor has used his magnificent voice and prodigious talent in a professional but hardly remarkable way, thanks to a role that hardly demands much of him. Just when we wonder whether the script will ever give him anything to do, he gets a marvelous soliloquy, playing on the Ancient Enemy's ego and vanity. After admitting that his colleagues have a plan to kill it, Flyte intones, “They don't know that Gods have nothing to fear...or do they?” The words roll off the actor's tongue in a way guaranteed to goad the beast into revealing itself, rather than admitting that it

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FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

DEEP RISING

Director-writer: Stephen Sommers. Hollywood, 1/98. 106 mins. R. With: Treat Williams, Famke Janssen, Anthony Heald, Kevin J. O'Connor, Wes Studi.

Despite different personnel, this film appears to be an unofficial follow-up to *ANACONDA*—with the same cartoony CGI effects. The significant difference is that *DEEP RISING* is not so bad that you wonder whether the laughs are intentional or not. Instead, writer-director Stephen Sommers succeeds at creating a slick, entertaining, big-budget equivalent of an old Roger Corman flick. The plot is amusingly over-complicated: Finnegan (Williams) ferries some mercenaries (led by Wes Studi as Hanover) to the middle of the ocean, where it turns out they plan to knock over a lavish luxury ship. The catch is that by the time the thieves reach their target, the cruise ship is mysteriously deserted. What started out as a heist movie turns into a monster flick, as Williams' crew join forces with the mercenaries to get some parts to repair his boat while dodging the creatures that devoured the passengers.

What ensues seems cobbled together from *SPEED 2*, *LEVIATHAN*, and *PHANTOMS*. The latter comparison is most obvious when the characters board the ghost ship and gradually realize that the inhabitants have been devoured by a monsters. (Actor Clifton Powell—General Cooperfield in *PHANTOMS*—even pops up as one of the mercenaries.) *DEEP RISING* never achieves the unnerving disquietude that marks the opening of *PHANTOMS* (the film tips its hand too early for the mystery to develop so well). However, it manages the shift to high-powered effects mode much more smoothly and winds up being more satisfying overall.

The credits for this goes to a tongue-in-cheek approach in which hu-

Denzel Washington's Detective Hobbes selects an isolated cabin for his face-off with a demon in *FALLEN*.



mor arises often from the characters and seldom from the ridiculousness of the scenario (although there is some of that too, as when Finnegan, at a crucial juncture, pauses to express silent grief over the loss of his friend—a sentimental moment so incongruous that it draws laughter).

The action-hero thing is not really Williams' forte (he shines in more realistic roles), but he acquits himself well. Janssen brings some glamour to another current cliché: the tough chick who holds her own with the men. O'Connor gets most of the laughs, but he has to compete with the supposedly bad-ass mercenaries, who amusingly crack under pressure. Overall, an entertaining if hardly profound debut from Sommers.

● ● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski

EDEN

Director-writer: Howard Goldberg. Legacy Releasing, 3/98. 109 mins. With: Joanna Going, Dylan Walsh, Sean Patrick Flanery.

This is a well-intentioned, sincere, and mostly effective piece of work that suffers slightly from a muted approach a little bit too skittish about emphasizing the fantasy element lurking in the storyline. Writer-director Howard Goldberg instead emphasizes the drama of the situation: in the early '60s, a woman named Helen Kunen (Going) is not only physically handicapped by multiple sclerosis; she is also socially handicapped by the role her husband, a college professor (Walsh), expects her to fill: although she is as well educated as he, and also evinces an effective, nurturing approach toward one of his problem students (Flanery)—an approach far more effective than her husband's heavy-handed methods—he expects her to stay home and be a housewife, rather than take a job as a teacher herself. Helen eventually escapes this overwhelming sense of constraint in dreams of floating out of her body. The experience is initially enriching—the sense of freedom brings a glow back into her features (nicely register by Going) that has been drained by her travails. However, her attempts to convey the importance of this experience to the people in her life prove futile and ultimately counter-productive. As the story progresses, the phenomenon takes a detrimental turn, until the character, instead of fighting her physical limitations, sinks further and further into physical lethargy, finally lapsing into a coma during most of the third act.

The basic situation presented here—a woman struggling to stand on her own two feet, both figuratively and literally—would have been enough to make a passable but unremarkable film. The addition of the preternatural element makes the film into something more. Although the astral projection is presented more as a metaphor than a fact—the narrative never confirms it as anything more than a subjective experience—it adds a layer of magic to the film.

If only that magic had been better exploited. Apparently worried about special effects overwhelming the story, Goldberg restricts the dreams of flight mostly to the character's own verbal descriptions, with only occasional visualizations (mostly in the form of a moving camera observing events where Helen is not physically present). The emphasis on characterization is the right one, but part of the story is the effect of this phenomenon on Helen. What we see is enough to *tell* us what this experience means to her, but it is not enough to make us *feel* the significance of what is supposed to be a transcendent, transforming experience. This sense of inspiration in the face of something miraculous could have elevated this film to greatness. What we have is still very good, but it doesn't quite soar.

● ● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski



A band of survivors (Anthony Heald, Treat Williams, Kevin J. O'Connor, Famke Janssen, and Wes Studi) anxiously await a voracious sea-going menace that has decimated a cruise ship in *DEEP RISING*.

FALLEN

Director: Gregory Hoblit. Writer: Nicholas Kazan. Warners, 1/98. 124 mins. R. With: Denzel Washington, John Goodman, Donald Sutherland, Embeth Davidtz, Elias Koteas.

FALLEN is a flawed yet wonderfully visceral film—adept at evoking fear and apprehension. Detective John Hobbes (Washington) has caught a notorious killer named Reese (a deliciously vile and unrecognizable Elias Koteas), who is put to death. Reese was actually a vessel for a demonic spirit out to destroy mankind and especially John Hobbes. Now that the mortal body is destroyed, the spirit moves freely from person to person. In a particularly chilling scene of realization, Hobbes chases someone inhabited by the demon out of the police station only to be transfixed on the street as he watches the spirit move from individual to individual like the baton in a relay race.

Hobbes eventually seeks help from Greta Milano (Davidtz), a professor of Theology. Greta's father, a police officer, committed suicide 30 years ago after finding himself in a situation similar to the one Hobbes now faces. Reluctantly, Greta confides she has been studying the demons and preparing for their arrival since her father's death. Unfortunately, although Greta is supposed to fill the Van Helsing role in the story, she seems to know absolutely nothing; she has no insight to bestow upon the helpless detective, no ideas on how he might fight this demon. In spite of the fact that Ms. Davidtz's character isn't given much purpose, she and the rest of the cast are good. Davidtz, John Goodman, and Washington convincingly play real people caught up in an increasingly nightmarish situation. Surprisingly satisfying as well is the realistic production design.

The conclusion is careless in its overzealous penchant for darkness. The film ends where it began, but things are not as we had thought they were: Washington's voice-over narration is not the voice of Hobbes but of the demon, whom Hobbes has lured into his body in an isolated location, after taking a fatal dose of poison. The "surprise" twist is that the demon escapes into the body of an animal. Yet if John Hobbes is willing to sacrifice himself to destroy the demon, he would have done his homework more thoroughly. And what is that domestic cat doing in the middle of nowhere near a snow-bound house that has been abandoned for years? A squirrel or a deer would have been more believable. It seems such a waste to have Denzel Washington die for nothing—which is what a sequel without him would be.

● ● Sonya Burres

THE UGLY

Director: Scott Reynolds. Trimark, 4/98. 90 mins. With: Paolo Rotundo, Rebecca Hobbs, Roy Ward.

Former projectionist Scott Reynolds, whose previous film career has consisted of short subjects, makes his full-length feature debut with this intense, horrifying bloodbath. The story follows the life of Simon, a serial killer incarcerated in a New Zealand institution for the criminally insane. Karen, a female psychiatrist, is called in by the killer to re-evaluate him. The doctors and orderlies of this maximum-security asylum seem as disturbed as the patients. Simon's guards torture and abuse him, and the satanic-looking head psychiatrist-warden thinks him a lost cause. Only Karen thinks she can reach him.

Reynolds adds new dimension to this *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*-like story by showing Karen's intruding presence in Simon's vivid flashbacks of childhood and past murders. There is seemingly no pattern to the killings: men, woman, children, lovers, strangers. The pivotal first murder occurred when at the age of 13 he slit his mother's throat while she slept. She had mentally and physically abused

him for years, after becoming unbalanced following a separation from her husband. When she tried to separate him from a female classmate with obvious designs on him, Simon snapped.

Countermanded by the negative remarks of the frightening Dr. Marlowe, Karen endangers herself by allowing Simon to manipulate her and to have his hands and legs freed. Seeing himself as "the Ugly Duckling," Simon is driven to kill by the voices of his past victims, who encourage more bloodshed and appear to him in horrifying visions before each murder. As Karen is drawn further and further into his power, she begins to pick up his visions telepathically, until she realizes she is to be his next victim.

Though well acted, *THE UGLY* will please hardcore gore lovers with its relentless scenes of throats being slashed, eyes being gouged, and everybody spurting black blood (though the film is in color). Others will find themselves turning away or being nonplussed by the endless red herrings and false alarms that Reynolds has inserted amongst the "actual" murder scenes. Not for the squeamish.

● ● Paul Wardle

In the climax of *THE UGLY*, psycho killer Simon (Paolo Rotundo) threatens the life of his clinical psychiatrist Karen (Rebecca Hobbs).



SOUNDTRAX

By Randall D. Larson

MUSIC TO CRASH TO *Howard Shore made a big impact.*

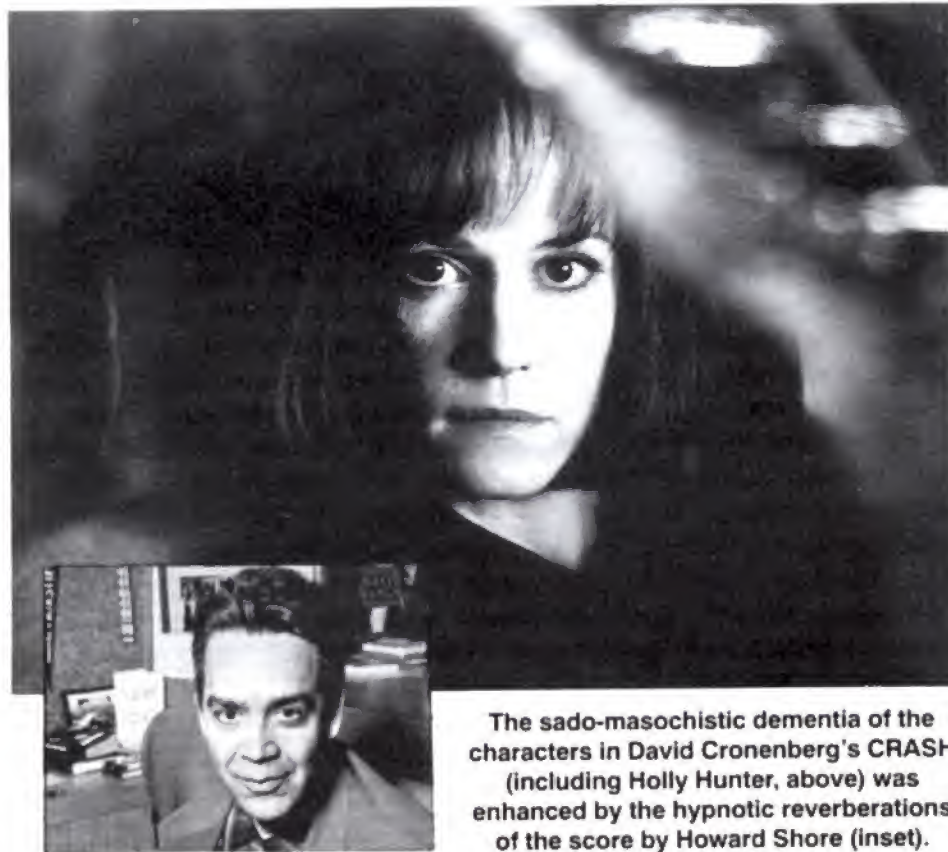
Howard Shore has scored eight of director David Cronenberg's twelve films, making their collaboration just about as productive as that of Tim Burton and Danny Elfman, Stephen Spielberg and John Williams, and Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann. From 1979's *THE BROOD* through *VIDEODROME* (1981), *THE FLY* (1986), *DEAD RINGERS* (1988?) and *NAKED LUNCH* (1991?), Shore's effective music has aided Cronenberg in his recurring dramatizations of sex and science gone awry.

For *CRASH*, Cronenberg's visceral adaptation of the J.G. Ballard novel, Howard Shore provided a highly modernistic, somewhat decadently erogenous score very suitable to the obsessive, aberrant darkness of Cronenberg's cinematic vision. "With *CRASH* we returned to the guerrilla filmmaking we used with *SCANNERS*," said Shore. "*SCANNERS* was a non-orchestral approach. *CRASH* was overlaid. Twenty-five percent of it is mutated versions of the original recording." Recorded by a small group consisting of six electric guitars, three harps, three woodwinds, and two percussionists, the unusual ensemble created a miasmatic ambience to the music and resulted in quite a sensually charged score. There are no real melodies, but more an electric ambience created by the guitars and harps, which tend to double one another. Remixing and resynthesizing the tracks also added to the chaotic ambience.

"The six guitarists played with just enough distortion and pedals, delay and speed," Shore said. "They played like a string quartet, as though it were chamber music."

Knowing the score would be recorded in Toronto, where both Shore and Cronenberg grew up (they knew each other and went to the same high school), allowed Shore to compose to a particular sound design he knew he could get at that studio. "I gear recordings to a specific locale, with a particular studio or console," he said. "I write for certain rooms. *CRASH*'s music is metallic, not dissonant, but melodic, an interweaving of melodic lines, hypnotic."

This hypnotic ambience permeates the entire score. The stri-



The sado-masochistic dementia of the characters in David Cronenberg's *CRASH* (including Holly Hunter, above) was enhanced by the hypnotic reverberations of the score by Howard Shore (inset).

dent, heavy notes from massive-sounding strings give voice to the protagonists' compulsions, and drive their carnal need for violence. For a film that deals so intimately with machines, Shore's choice of metallic-sounding guitars was perfect. He uses melody in fragments—there are no lyrical lines in the *CRASH* score, but a series of melodic shards, minimally conceived and thickly overlaid.

"I use certain minimalist techniques, but I'm not limited to any one style," said Shore. "Working in film scores and with Cronenberg in particular means that I can freely mix musical styles. I can move from 19th-century harmony to 20th-century harmony without any restrictions. *CRASH* breaks all genres."

After recording the 14-player ensemble in Toronto, Shore took it to his studio for extensive computerized reworking of the sounds. "I am interested in the manipulation of sound, remixing, cutting, and sampling," he said. "Electronics plays an important part in my scores, and I always incorporate it into my techniques. Earlier scores of mine such as *DEAD RINGERS* and *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* were far more orchestral." The score was recorded in layers. "The three harpists played the same music as the guitarists, but were recorded on different

days," he said. "Seventy-five percent of the score as composed while 25 percent was created after the music was recorded. I manipulated the sound in the studio by layering the various tracks. Most scores I record live with all the musicians in one place. I didn't need the interplay for this score; it was not necessary for the final result."

Shore did read Ballard's original book prior to working on the score, although he said he derives no musical ideas from the book. "I don't generate musical ideas upon reading the book or screenplay," said Shore. "It is only when I see the movie—that's what sparks my creativity."

Shore's collaboration with Cronenberg has been a fruitful one, the director's unique visions inspiring equally unique film music. "It is a great challenge to keep up with David Cronenberg," said Shore. "As a composer, it's a great relationship. I am challenged by always having to make something different from before; I can't go over old ground." He concluded, "Cronenberg's movies are the backbone of my work, the most complete part. Everything else is an offshoot of that. It has been invigorating to watch the progress in movie making Cronenberg has made from *THE BROOD* in 1979 to *CRASH* in 1996." □

REISSUES, REVIVALS, AND RESTORATIONS: "The Lost World"

By Lokke Heiss

Each year, film enthusiasts gather in Pordenone, Italy (a small town near Venice), to watch a program of silent films gathered from collections and archives around the world. Past festivals have shown the silent live-action version of *PINOCCHIO*, an early rendition of *PETER PAN*, and even a Soviet adaptation of Poe's *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*.

One of the joys of this festival is the screening of rediscovered or restored films. The highlight last year was the premiere of an essentially full-length version of *THE LOST WORLD* (1925), the grand-daddy of all rampaging dinosaur movies. Based on a novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes), this film had its running time cut in half after its initial release, severely affecting the story, characters, and special effects. For years the only copies available were taken from poorly duped 16mm prints. In 1991, Lumivision produced a laser disc edition (with tints and a musical score) that came much closer to the experience of watching the original film. But what could be done about the missing half of the footage?

In an effort requiring cooperation from film archives around the globe, *THE LOST WORLD* was painstakingly reassembled. The biggest help was the discovery of a European release version held by the Filmovy Archive of the Czech Republic. This enabled the archivists to restore most of the lost running time.

After all this time and care, what is the verdict? Happily, the restored film is immensely better. The human characters (featuring Wallace Beery as Professor Challenger) have more time to develop relationships that make the story far more interesting. The dinosaurs (courtesy of stop-motion pioneer Willis O'Brien) also fare better, with some beautiful, tinted shots of herds roaming on the plateau. The crucial last segment of the brontosaurus's London rampage is still missing a few shots, but it is almost complete. (O'Brien more or less recreated this sequence decades later for 1961's *THE GIANT BEHEMOTH*.) A restored scene shows the brontosaurus poking his head in a hotel window, making the precedents for O'Brien's future work on *KING KONG* even more obvious.

My favorite scene in this restored version comes at the very end. There is a brief, stop-motion animated sequence of the escaped brontosaurus swimming away to safety in the Atlantic. He lifts up his head to see a steam ship cross by, then swims on. The Ancient World and the Modern World pass each other in the night, irreconcilable, capable only of destroying each other if forced to live together. □

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DIRECT-TO-VIDEO

THE CREEPS

Director: Charles Band. Writer: Benjamin Carr. Full Moon Pictures, 10/97. In 3-D. With: Rhonda Griffin, Justin Lauer, Bill Moynihan.

Silly, affectionate, and amusing, **THE CREEPS** features pint-sized version of the classic movie monsters Dracula, Frankenstein, Werewolf, and the Mummy (strong makeups by Atlantic West Effects) and was shot in 3-D, which apart from the opening credits, worked pretty well. The premise has an addled inventor stealing the original manuscripts of the classic horror novels to create real life versions of these archetypes that he expects will submit to his command. Rhonda Griffin stars as a librarian ordered to retrieve a lost manuscript by her lesbian superior (not a film for little kids who aren't likely to get references to Rita Mae Brown, et al.) who in her desperation hires a would-be private detective who works out of his video rental store. The film benefits from scripter Carr's absurdist touches, though it is not as funny as some of his previous efforts (**HEAD OF THE FAMILY**, **HIDEOUS!**). Stay around after the end credits for an extra bit of silliness set to the tune of a highly recognizable television theme from the seventies.

Dennis Fischer ●●

HIDEOUS!

Director: Charles Band. Writer: Benjamin Carr. Amazing Fantasy, 8/97. 82 mins. With: Rhonda Griffin, Michael Citrini, Mel Johnson Jr, Jerry O'Donnell.

HIDEOUS! proves an offbeat and pleasant surprise by being a low budget Full Moon effort that is genuinely funny. The plot revolves around competing freak collectors who vie for an aborted, deformed fetus recently pulled from the sewer and obtained by a freak dealer (Griffin), whose ditsy receptionist (Tracie May) is one of the funniest dumb blondes in years. Adding spice to the mix is an outrageous heist in the snow committed by Jacqueline Lovell

Jerry O'Donnell as the private eye and Jacqueline Lovell as the freak collector, searching a Rumanian castle for a prized deformity in Full Moon's **HIDEOUS!**



wearing nothing but hot pants, leather boots, and a gorilla mask. Throw in a seedy private eye (O'Donnell) who tags along on a trip to the requisite bad guy's castle and who can't believe what this bizarre case entails, rubbery telepathic monster baby freaks, and a generous dollop of straight-faced, tongue-in-cheek humor, and it adds up to one of Band's better efforts. **Dennis Fischer ●●**

PHANTOMS

continued from page 58

might be vulnerable. Chapelle's visualization of the creature's final appearance—accompanied by the

phantoms of its victims, silently assembled on a snowy street in what is now almost literally a ghost town—is not just a special effects showcase, but an effectively spooky piece of imagery that lingers in the imagination long after the credits fade.

Unfortunately, the film didn't have the wit to end here, opting instead for one of those dumb, there-will-be-a-sequel tags. The scene undermines not only the effectiveness of the climax but of the film as a whole. Intended as a joke, it is at the expense of the audience. The filmmakers, in a sense, tell viewers that what they have been watching is nothing but a dumb horror movie, in which credibility is of little concern. It's quite a come-down considering how good some of the sequences were.

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LETTERS

TRIALS AND TRIBBLE-ATIONS

As someone who worked with both Gary Hutzel and Greg Jein on *STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE*'s "Trials and Tribble-ations," I am pleased to be able to confirm Anna Kaplan's report (CFQ 29:6/7) that both of these artisans, with the blessings of our producers, did indeed go to extraordinary lengths to assure the accuracy of their re-created spaceship models.

Mr. Richard Datin expresses concern [29:11:62] about errors in certain reference materials, but fortunately, Greg was well aware of most of these problems, and few, if any, were reflected in the final models. In particular, Greg Jein and Gary Kerr (who did much of the research) knew of the changes introduced during the 1991 restoration of the 11-foot *Enterprise* at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. While Greg relied heavily upon the 11-foot model for geometry, paint and coloration was based on film reference. This included some subtle airbrushing that, according to vintage reference stills, did exist during the filming of the original *STAR TREK* series.

It would, indeed have been very nice if we had access to Mr. Datin's reference materials during our research phase, but we were unaware of their availability.

Mr. Datin's comments on the K-7 space station are a little more puzzling. He's undoubtedly correct that the relative size of the new station miniature is different from the original model in relationship to the new *Enterprise*. Nevertheless, Gary Hutzel was careful in the final visual effects scenes to composite the two in a relative scale consistent with their appearance in the original episode. The only significant inaccuracies in the station model that we aware of include:

1. The addition of some extremely fine pencil and tape lines on the model, intended to enhance the illusion of scale in close shots. These lines are subtle enough that they would not have been visible in the original shots from "The Trouble With Tribbles" (TOS).

2. Jason Kaufman, a model-maker at Greg's shop, added a tiny interior to the docking bay on the station's lower module (including

a model of what is presumably Cyrano Jones's spaceship). The interior lights in this miniature set are the only lights on the new model that were not seen in the original episode.

3. Greg changed a tiny number "3" painted on the side of the docking bay to a tiny number "2".

I'm genuinely disappointed that Mr. Datin found some of the work in "Trials and Tribble-ations" wanting. One of the goals of everyone who worked so hard on that episode was to express our admiration and gratitude to the genius of such luminaries as Gene Roddenberry, Gene L. Coon, Bob Justman, D.C. Fontana, David Gerrold, Matt Jefferies, and Richard Datin. Without their remarkable work, *STAR TREK* would not have existed 30 years ago and would not continue to be enjoyed by so many fans today.

Michael Okuda
Scenic Art Supervisor,
STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE
Hollywood, CA 90038

"BEAST OF HOLLOW MOUNTAIN" LASER DISC

Dennis Fischer errs in his "Laserblast" commentary on *THE BEAST OF HOLLOW MOUNTAIN* [29:8:62]. Though based on a story by Willis O'Brien, he was in no way involved in the making of the film. According to the director's son, Edward Nassour, the stop-motion was done by uncredited Henry Lyon and Jay Baylor using the replacement animation technique of the Puppets rather than the articulated puppet approach pioneered by O'Brien and Marcel Delgado. In replacement animation the animated figure is made from molds with a separate one for each position the figure is required to take. Also, of the few stop-motion films photographed in the anamorphic format, *HOLLOW MOUNTAIN* is the only one whose rear projection plates were also shot with anamorphic lenses, a further complication due to the focus problems on both the camera and miniature projection sides.

Rick Mitchell
Film Editor/Film Director/Film
Historian/Historical Technical
Advisor to *American Cinematographer* and *Films In Review*

**ALIEN 4:
ARTY AND AWFUL**
ALIEN RESURRECTION [29:8:

12], Oh, how I hate thee, let me count the ways. The latest in the *ALIEN* series is, without a doubt, the most disappointing of the series.

1) The film lifts whole cloth scenes from the first two films of the series, including the new (god-awful) Alien Queen, which makes its way into the escaping ship for a battle royale, but a weaker less interesting version than was portrayed in the second film, *ALIENS*.

2) This latest in the Alien saga is devoid of likeable characters. Ripley has now become dispensable. About the only likeable character is Winona Ryder's, Call, and she turns out to not even be human.

3) One of the better scenes is the sacrifice of one of the Alien's own to escape from the containment cell, but the scene is rendered pointless when the audience is shown that the Aliens can spit acid. If they could have done that, why didn't they just spit on the floor and escape, and have one more warrior.

4) Changing the computer from Mother to Father is not a creative leap, it's just lame.

5) In what was the worst check for weapons in the history of military security, the crew of the Betty gains entry with several guns and knives. Security at your local airport is better than at this secret military installation floating in space.

6) The last irony is that the makers of *ALIEN 4* are far afield from the heart and soul of the series. It has become an art fuck film fest, and the creative people just don't get it. Hopefully the audience will talk with its ticket money and go see something else. And if all 20th Century-Fox is interested in is the art film approach to the *ALIEN* series, then they will have to depend on the foreign market to put these films in the black. Which is apparently what the third film did, since *ALIEN 3* opened at \$25 million but dropped like a stone, and only managed \$54 million for its total domestic gross. If this is what the French want, they can have it. Bring back Ridley Scott, James Cameron or anyone who really loves the film series, and get rid of Ripley; she's outlived her usefulness in this series.

Jeff Kilian
Wichita, KS

HORROR—BOOM OR BUST PART II

While I don't disagree with Mr. Nahmod comments [29:9:62], other than calling *ANACONDA* "good" I think he may have missed a key point. As I stated in my article [29:4/5:80], it was not my intention to "judge these films artistically, but rather from the viewpoint of the studios that make them. Good or bad doesn't matter to them, only success. Thanks to *SCREAM*, horror is momentarily hot again, but how long it will last will be decided by the boxoffice, not by artistic merit. I also agree that the budgets of these same films are ridiculous, but the days of *HAMMER* and *AIP* are long gone and unlikely to return. We have reached a point where paying a Jim Carrey or Tom Cruise \$20 million is a sound business decision, because their presence will bring people to opening week. For horror to thrive again, it will have to become a "star" again. It's hot right now thanks to *SCREAM*, but whether it's on its way to being the next Tom Cruise, or the next C. Thomas Howell, remains to be seen.

John Thonen
Kansas City, MO 64138

MARK ALTMAN'S NEXT GIG

After the selling of Mark Altman's *Sci-fi Universe*, I would like to know if he is coming back to your magazine as a regular writer or as an occasional writer. I hope you do consider this option because Mr. Altman always has a great view on the movie-business without trying to please the movie-producers/makers. Couldn't you give him a column each month with his opinion on the business.

Peter Hinoul
@vlaanderen.be
[We invited Altman back, of course. But Altman is producing his own movie now and has bigger fish to fry. We'll keep you posted.]

CORRECTION G'KAR IMPOSTER

We misidentified the photo on page 34 of our *BABYLON 5* article in the January issue (29:9:34) as G'Kar (Andreas Katsulas). The handsome Narn in the photo with Majel Barrett-Roddenberry is actually Marshall Teague as Ta'Lon.

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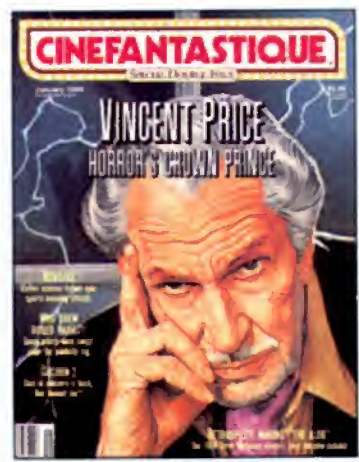
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